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Blinken joins 11th-hour talks on Gaza ceasefire deal

Bethan McKernan
Jerusalem

The US secretary of state has arrived in Israel for 11th-hour talks aimed at shoring up a deal for a lasting ceasefire in the war in Gaza, amid signals from Israeli and Hamas officials that a breakthrough is not as close as international mediators had suggested.

Antony Blinken flew into Tel Aviv yesterday as part of renewed US efforts to broker a ceasefire in the 10-month-old conflict, negotiations seen as even more urgent after last month's assassinations of a top Hezbollah commander and the Hamas political chief, Ismail Haniyeh.

It is hoped a ceasefire would lower the temperature in the Middle East and dissuade Iran and Hezbollah from retaliatory action that could cause the war in Gaza to slide quickly into a region-wide conflict.

The US's top diplomat will seek to "conclude the agreement for a ceasefire and release of hostages and detainees" during his 10th visit to the region since the war broke out following Hamas's 7 October attack, the state department said. Blinken is expected to meet senior leaders including Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, today before travelling to Egypt.

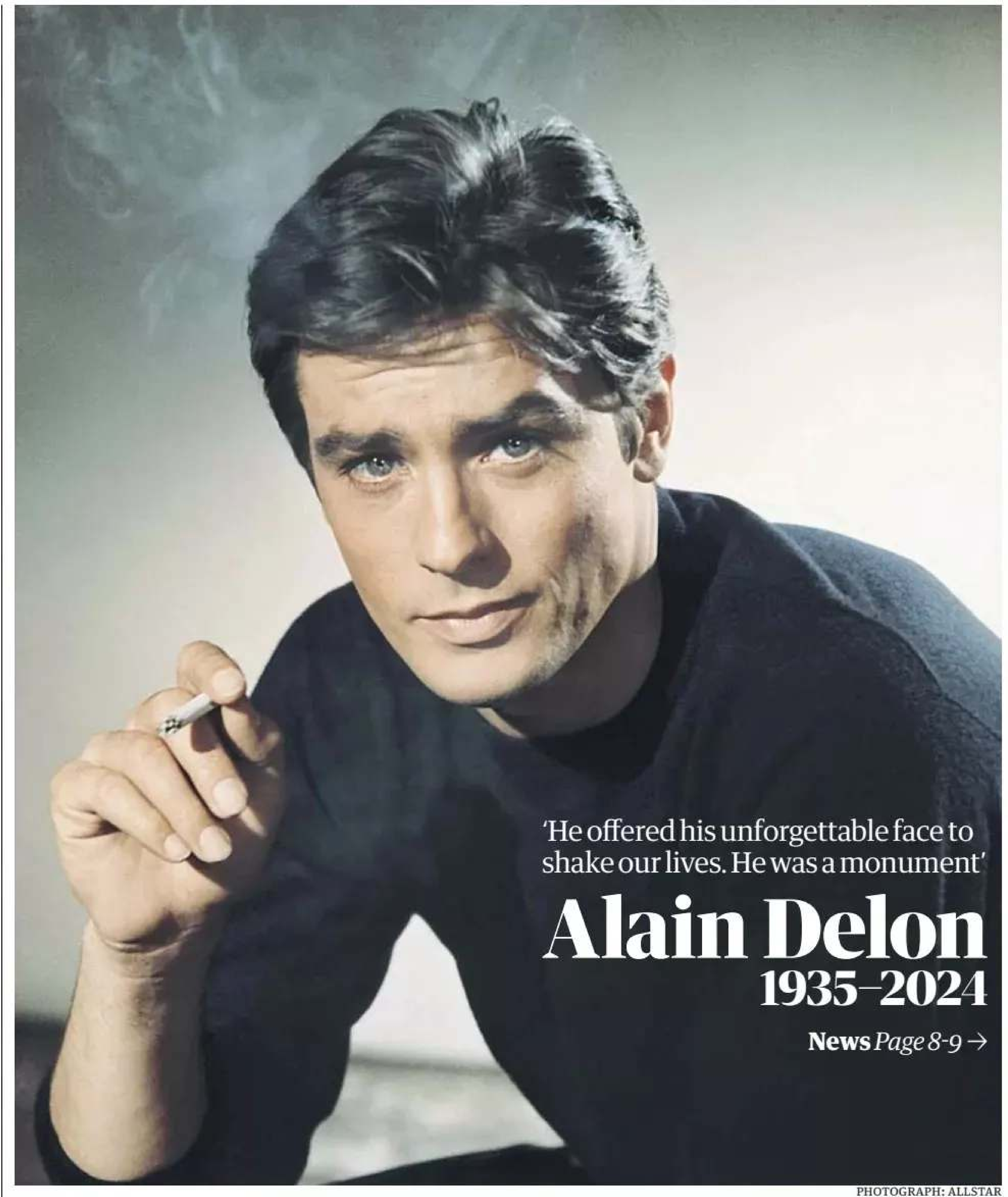
The mediators, America, Qatar and Egypt, struck an optimistic tone after two days of talks in the Qatari capital Doha last week, announcing a "bridging proposal" had been agreed. Negotiations to close remaining gaps are expected to resume in Cairo on Wednesday or Thursday.

The US is keen to announce a deal during the Cairo summit, as the focus in Washington turns to November's US election. However, Hamas, which is not directly participating in this round of talks, has said the idea that a deal is getting closer is "an illusion".

Last night it said the new proposal was too aligned with the Israeli prime minister's position. "We hold Netanyahu fully responsible for thwarting the mediators' efforts, delaying the agreement, and for the lives of his prisoners who are exposed to the same danger as our people due to his ongoing aggression and systematic targeting of all aspects of life in the Gaza Strip," Hamas said.

Israeli officials have also expressed caution. "After


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PHOTOGRAPH: ALLSTAR

Child strip-search race bias remains – watchdog

Rajeev Syal
Home affairs editor

Black children are four times more likely to be strip-searched by police in England and Wales than their white counterparts, the latest figures disclosed by a watchdog show.

The children's commissioner also found that children under the age of 15 were a bigger proportion of those subjected to intimate searches, official figures from the year to June 2023 showed. Fewer than half of all searches of children in that year (45%) were conducted in the presence of an appropriate adult.

A report released today also found that nearly nine out of every 10 searches [88%] conducted by England and Wales's 44 forces were trying to find drugs. It said that over the five years to June 2023, children as young as eight had been strip-searched every 14 hours on average by police in England.

More than 3,000 intimate procedures were conducted on children between January 2018 and June 2023.

In response to the report, police admitted "too many strip-searches carried out are unnecessary, unsafe and under-reported".

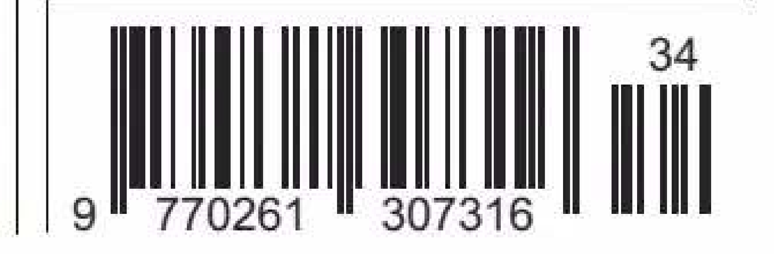
The practice of child strip-searches prompted a national outcry after the Child Q scandal, when it emerged in 2022 that a 15-year-old black girl was strip-searched at school for drugs in east London. No cannabis, the grounds for the search, was found.

Assistant chief constable Andrew Mariner, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for stop and search, said: "Two years on from the shocking case of Child Q, we are seeing progress being made. I welcome this shift, and I am cautiously optimistic about the potential to overcome entrenched systemic

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Exclusive
UK sperm being exported despite 10-family limit

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News



Clemency Jacques and her son, Alex. She was told to pay £1,300 for an accidental breach of carer's allowance rules or have her case sent to the CPS
PHOTOGRAPH: JILL MEAD/ THE GUARDIAN

Carer says fraud prosecution threat was 'like blackmail'

Patrick Butler
Social policy editor

A vulnerable unpaid carer threatened by benefits officials with prosecution for fraud unless she agreed to pay an extra £1,300 penalty for an accidental breach of carer's allowance earnings rules has described her experience as "like blackmail".

Clemency Jacques, a carer for her disabled son, was told by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) investigators her case would be referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) unless she paid a 50% charge on top of an existing agreement to repay £2,600 in carer's allowance overpayments – a total of £3,900.

Jacques, 43, a former NHS psychologist, who cares for her severely disabled son and frail elderly mother, said she was threatened with prosecution even though the DWP accepted she had made an "unintentional error."

Jacques's treatment was condemned as a "disgrace" and "inhumane" by politicians and campaigners amid growing concern over the DWP's policy of prosecuting – or threatening with prosecution – carers who unwittingly breach carer's allowance benefit earnings rules by relatively minor amounts.

"Agreeing to the administrative penalty feels more like blackmail than an actual choice. It's like: 'Say how naughty you have been and pay a large chunk of money or we will send you to court and punish you for being a stressed-out carer,' Jacques said.

The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, who is a carer for his disabled teenage son, said: "The fact the government is forcing carers to chose between an expensive fine or a criminal record, just for making an innocent mistake, is a disgrace."

The DWP said last night it was reviewing Jacques's case "as a matter of urgency." The government last month promised a wider review of carer's allowance in the wake of a Guardian investigation that revealed tens of thousands of unpaid carers were repaying more than £250m in overpayments that in many cases had been allowed to accumulate owing to years of DWP administrative failures.

Carer's allowance, worth £81.90 a week, is claimed by just under a million unpaid carers who look after disabled, frail and ill loved ones for at least 35 hours a week. Most are women and many are in poverty.

Jacques's case was taken up this year by her then MP Caroline Lucas, who asked the DWP to review its decision. Lucas described Jacques's treatment by officials as "disproportionate and inhumane" and argued they had failed to consider "the exceptional and extenuating circumstances" of her situation.

Jacques, who is a single mother, said at the time of the overpayments she was overwhelmed by looking after her severely disabled toddler son, Alex, who had been born prematurely and needed constant care, while also caring for her mother who had Alzheimer's.

Jacques herself had post-traumatic stress related to birth complications and was attempting to move back into work after maternity leave.

Responding to Lucas in May, the DWP complaints team stood by its decision, saying it had followed the correct processes and taken "reasonable, necessary and proportionate" actions. It said it was not its intention "to cause claimants any undue distress" but had a "responsibility to protect public funds and preserve public trust".

Jacques said she had been left "petrified" by the DWP's treatment of her for what she said was an unwitting oversight made during a period when she was under extreme stress. "What is most frustrating is that I didn't claim fraudulently. I was most definitely a carer twice over. I didn't fake or overstate my situation," she said.

Under carer's allowance earnings rules, claimants must pay back the entire £81.90 a week benefit if they earn more than the £151 a week earnings limit, even by a penny. In Jacques's case, the DWP would have been alerted immediately by HMRC that she had returned to paid work and was earning above the limit, but it did not act, allowing her overpayments to rise to a size where prosecution for fraud became a possibility.

The Guardian can reveal the DWP has levied more than £5m in additional fines on thousands of carers in the past four years relating to earnings rule breaches, on top of clawing back at least £250m in carer's allowance overpayments.

These comprise £420,000 from administrative penalties such as the one paid by Jacques – 225 claimants have paid these since 2020 to prevent their case from being passed to the CPS – and £4.8m in more routine civil penalties of £50, levied on at least 98,000 carers deemed to have breached earnings rules over the same four-year period.

Dominic Carter, the director of policy at Carers Trust, said: "Sadly we have heard of plenty of examples like this. It's frustrating so many carers continue to fall foul of a system not fit for the present day. Carers shouldn't be made to feel like criminals, they should be recognised for the contribution they make to society and to the taxpayer."

'Bloody scary' story
How it feels to be interviewed

Clemency Jacques's interview under caution by benefits officials is seared into her memory. She was accused of benefits fraud and, utterly bewildered, she tried to defend herself. It did not go well. "I sat there for two hours crying," she says.

In a room at the local jobcentre, officials had read her her rights "just like in the movies". She was warned she could face police arrest, referral to the Crown Prosecution Service and a criminal court appearance. It was "bloody scary", she says.

Jacques had been hauled in after failing to inform carer's allowance officials that she had returned to work after maternity leave. As a result, she had breached carer's allowance earnings rules and had been overpaid by £2,600 over 10 months.

She offered to repay it straight away. She explained that the error was unintentional, one dropped plate among the hundreds she was spinning while caring for her severely disabled son Alex and frail elderly mother.

"I apologised and said it was a complete mistake. But the interview process is designed to be as cold and dehumanising as possible, focusing on trying to prove my guilt, trying to catch me out with every statement I made."

> *'I was petrified of their threat to prosecute me and my life being ruined by a criminal record'*
> **Clemency Jacques**
> *Carer*

Earlier this year, months after her traumatic interview under caution, a DWP official called her to say that while she had committed a "prosecutable offence", they recognised it was an unintentional error and noted she had been cooperative.

"So I was lucky," she says. "They had decided to be more lenient on me and I was given the 'opportunity' to sign a bit of paper admitting my guilt and agreeing to pay an administrative penalty of 50% of the overpayment."

She resented the implication she was guilty of fraud but felt she had no choice but to agree to pay a charge now totalling £3,900.

"I didn't want to do this, I shouldn't have had to do this, but I was petrified of their threat to prosecute me and my life being ruined by getting a criminal record for fraud."

Having given birth prematurely to her son two years previously, Jacques says, "I wasn't really on maternity leave at all, I was quite literally fighting for Alex's life daily."

She says it is frustrating that while she had indeed failed to inform the carer's allowance section of her change in circumstances, she had told the DWP's universal credit section she had returned to work – but the two departments did not share the information.

The experience has left Jacques scarred. "I wish I had never applied for carer's allowance in the first place," she says. "The system unfairly punishes carers, it knows it does, and it doesn't care." Patrick Butler

No drinks, no ice creams: theatre intervals in peril as producers say the show must go on


Many theatres rely on bar sales during the interval as a valuable source of income
PHOTOGRAPH: ROBERT NICKELSBERG/GETTY

Nadia Khomami
Zainab Haji

For some it is an indispensable part of their night at the theatre, a chance to top up a glass of wine, quickly appraise the plot and, crucially, to pop to the loo. To others it is an interruption that impedes the drama and makes the eventual journey home even later.

Now it appears the contentious nature of the theatre interval is giving producers their own pause for thought. With more and more shows being staged across London without breaks - from Slave Play at the Noël Coward to The Years at the Almeida - experts say changing audience habits and a desire for fully immersive theatre is behind the shift.

"It's a surprising development given that revenue from bar sales is such a vital source of income for most theatres," said James Rowson, a lecturer in theatre and cultural policy at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. "Especially when so many theatre buildings are currently under increasing financial pressures as a result of funding cuts and the cost of living crisis."

Rowson said the shift could be a hangover from the pandemic, when many people fell out of the habit of attending the theatre. "It could well be that by staging productions without intervals and cutting running times, theatres are attempting to win back hesitant members of the public and establish a new generation of theatregoers."

This, he added, could "re-establish theatre in the night-time ecology in a more flexible way by allowing theatregoers to build watching a show into a night out with other activities, or simply make it home from a show earlier".

Over the past four years, much has been written about whether the era of intervals is over. Writing in the Stage, Lyn Gardner called intervals an "outmoded, unnecessary theatre convention".

After lockdown, the Globe took a more relaxed approach to intervals. Its artistic director, Michelle Terry, said Shakespeare's plays were "never written with intervals, so we won't play them with intervals".

The Guardian's chief theatre critic, Arifa Akbar, said: "The no-interval show definitely seemed to be born out of necessity over the pandemic, with its smaller casts and shorter running time.

"But it has become its own art form too. There is a fast and furious energy to these shows that will definitely appeal to a younger generation. There are also some shows, such as The Years, where an interval would feel like an interruption to their pace and intensity."


The musical Six has no natural place for a break, according to the show's producer, Kenny Wax
PHOTOGRAPH: PAMELA RAITH

The theatre producer Kenny Wax, who has two musicals playing in London without intervals, Six (Vaudeville Theatre) and Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World (The Other Palace), said the decision was an artistic one.

"In the case of both of those productions, which have a running time around the 80- to 85-minute mark, it would slow down the momentum of the journey and there isn't really a natural place for a break," he said.

Wax explained how each decision had also been based on the venue. For example, The Play That Goes Wrong by the Mischief Theatre Company was originally written as a one-act play that ran at Trafalgar Studio 2.

But to make the play "commercial", he decided to book a UK tour of regional venues. "It's easier to sell a production into those regional theatres if the shows have an interval because they rely on bar sales as a valuable source of income.

"Some venues charge the producer a 'no-interval financial penalty' for not having an interval. They regard it as an income to balance up the loss in bar sales."

Only the strongest titles, such as Six and Stephen Daldry's multi-award-winning National Theatre production of An Inspector Calls, had the bargaining power to cut a deal, Wax said - which goes some way to explain why a lot of shows without intervals seem to feature big name stars such as Kit Harington or Jodie Comer.

"If the venue needs the show more than the show needs a particular venue, the producer has the upper hand and can usually get the penalty clause struck out," he said.

Max Webster, who is directing Macbeth, starring David Tennant and Cush Jumbo, at the Harold Pinter theatre, said he had chosen to skip the interval to create an experience "that immerses an audience into a world". During the play, audience members are also asked to wear headphones.

"I felt that not letting them come up for air would be a good way to make an intense and exciting experience," Webster said.

But anecdotally, theatregoers across the capital have complained about attending shows where their viewing experience has been disrupted by other people's constant trips to the bathroom.

Webster acknowledged the benefits of intervals. But ultimately, he believed the decision depended on the play.

"What I like is, there's an increasing flexibility of us being allowed to try and find the best shape of an evening that suits the story we're trying to tell," he said.

Mark Hutchings, the author of Approaching the Interval in Early Modern Theatre, said that historically, intervals provided the opportunity to put on entertainment such as music and dancing.

In the Shakespearean period, he added, the structure of plays was dictated by light. Outdoor plays were sunlit and therefore ran without interruption. But indoors, candles were needed, and breaks were necessary to mend and snuff them.

Though Hutchings said some critics may think intervals are a "pain in the neck" or that they "zap the buzz", he preferred them because they provided an opportunity to discuss the play with fellow audience members or stretch your legs.

"The interval is always much more than a gap," he said. "A cynic would say you can even walk out."

Break free
London shows with no intermission

A Chorus Line
Running time: 1hr 55min
Directed by Nikolai Foster, A Chorus Line uses real-life testimonies from performers to tell the tale of 17 hopefuls auditioning for a new musical in 1975, where only eight will make the cut.
Sadler's Wells, until 25 August

Macbeth
Running time: 1hr 50min
David Tennant and Cush Jumbo (pictured) lead this immersive production of Shakespeare's Scottish play directed by Max Webster. The audience are brought intimately close to the feverish action through the use of 3D headphones magnifying every whisper of dialogue.
Harold Pinter, until 14 December



Slave Play
Running time 2hrs
This Tony-nominated drama follows the legacy of historical racial violence in three couples' sexual dynamics.
Noël Coward, until 1 September

Six
Running time 1hr 20min
The hit West End musical is a modern retelling of the lives of Henry VIII's six wives in the form of a singing competition.
Vaudeville theatre

Shifters
Running time 1hr 40min
Two childhood lovers are brought together eight years after splitting up. Written by Benedict Lombe, who won the Susan Smith Blackburn prize in 2022 for her debut, Lava, this is a duologue told from two perspectives.
Duke of York's, until 12 October

Blinken flies in for 11th-hour Gaza talks amid fears of widening conflict

Continued from page 1

the United States accepted most of [Israel's] demands, we have to be flexible on the clarifications that were added," an unnamed source told Israel's Channel 12. "Otherwise, there isn't any chance of bringing Hamas to the table … from its perspective, this is an American-Israeli proposal."

Netanyahu said at the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday: "I would like to emphasise we are conducting negotiations and not a scenario in which we just give and give. There are things we can be flexible on and things that we cannot be flexible on, which we will insist on.

"Therefore, alongside the major efforts we are making to return our hostages, we stand on the principles that we have determined, which are vital for the security of Israel."

Hamas and Israel agreed in principle last month to implement a three-phase framework publicly proposed by Biden in May and endorsed by the UN security council. It would involve an initial six-week ceasefire during which a limited number of Israeli hostages would be freed in exchange for Palestinians in Israeli jails, and the amount of humanitarian aid entering the strip would increase.

Unlike the week-long truce that collapsed at the end of November, this ceasefire would be indefinitely extendable while negotiators thrash out details of the next stage, so an impasse would not necessarily trigger a return to hostilities.

Hamas has said the latest version of the proposal diverges significantly from the May iteration after Israeli demands were added, including a permanent Israeli military presence along the Gaza-Egypt border and the Netzarim corridor, the new Israeli-controlled barrier bisecting the strip.

Israel says the measures are necessary to stop Hamas and other militias rearming and regrouping. Hamas has reiterated its demand that Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza as a prelude to ending the war. Israel has not been willing to agree to go beyond a temporary pause in the fighting.

Critics at home and abroad have accused Netanyahu of stalling on a deal for political gain, but Israeli media reported that the prime minister was scheduled to meet his negotiating team yesterday to review whether an Israeli presence in the two areas was non-negotiable.



▲ Antony Blinken arrives in Tel Aviv for crucial talks on a Gaza ceasefire

According to Egyptian officials who spoke to the Associated Press, Egyptian and Israeli military officials are expected to meet next week to discuss the possibility of a withdrawal mechanism from Rafah, on the Gaza-Egypt border. The Rafah crossing is the Strip's main lifeline to the rest of the world; humanitarian groups have complained of backlogs since Israel seized control of the area in May. Last week, the Palestinian health authority confirmed the first case of polio in the Strip for 25 years.

Despite speculation over a ceasefire, the bloodshed continues: Israeli strikes across the territory killed 28 people overnight and into yesterday morning, according to first responders, including a woman and her six children in the central town of Deir al-Balah.

Mohammed Awad Khatab, the children's grandfather, said his daughter was a teacher and her youngest child was 18 months old. The others were 10-year-old quintuplets, al-Aqsa hospital said. "The six children have become body parts. They were placed in a single bag," the grandfather told reporters. "What did they do? Did they kill any of the Jews? … Will this provide security to Israel?"

Last night one person was killed after a bomb exploded in Tel Aviv, Israeli police said. "All investigative avenues are being explored," a police spokesperson said.

Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah have flared after an Israeli strike on southern Lebanon on Saturday that killed 10 people, one of the deadliest single attacks on Lebanon since Hezbollah and Israel started cross-border fire on 8 October.

Hezbollah and Iran's other allies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen have said they will stop attacking Israel when the war in Gaza is ended. The long-running shadow war between Israel and Iran burst into the open for the first time in April, when Tehran launched more than 300 ballistic missiles and drones at Israel in revenge for the killing of several Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders in Damascus.



Foreign Office
Official resigns over refusal to ban arms sales

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor

A Foreign Office official has resigned because of the UK's refusal to ban arms exports to Israel over alleged breaches of international law.

Mark Smith, a counter-terrorism official at the British embassy in Dublin, said he had resigned after making numerous internal complaints, including through an official whistleblowing mechanism, and receiving nothing but pro forma responses.

Smith said he had previously worked in Middle East arms export licensing assessment for the government, and "each day" colleagues were witnessing "clear and unquestionable examples" of war crimes and breaches of international humanitarian law by Israel in Gaza.

He wrote: "Senior members of the Israeli government and military have expressed open genocidal intent, Israeli soldiers take videos deliberately burning, destroying and looting civilian property. Over half of Gaza's homes and over 80% of Gaza's commercial properties have been damaged or destroyed.

"Whole streets and universities have been demolished, humanitarian aid is being blocked and civilians are regularly left with no safe quarter to flee to. Red Crescent ambulances have been attacked, schools and hospitals are regularly targeted. These are War Crimes."

He said there was "no justification for the UK's continued arms sales to Israel, yet somehow it continues".

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said it could not comment on an individual case but the government was committed to upholding international law. The Labour government has pledged to review the policy of arms sales to Israel, but has not come to any decision.

The foreign secretary, David Lammy, has said the government may allow Israel to be supplied with defensive weapons but cut off the flow of UK-supplied offensive weapons being used in Gaza. He said this was a complex judicial process.

Smith said he was resigning with sadness after a long career in the Foreign Office, adding that the only response he received to his complaints was to the effect of "thank you, we have noted your concerns".

He said it was deeply troubling as a senior officer to be disregarded in this way, adding that many other senior colleagues had raised their concerns.

According to the email, Smith's role was "second secretary counter terrorism" - understood to be a relatively junior rank, but one in which he described himself as "a subject matter expert in the domain of arms sales policy".

The UK is facing a judicial review over its arms sales policy that will focus on whether the Foreign Office has acted perversely in not banning arms sales.

Israel insists it is acting in self-defence and does all that it can to distinguish between civilian and Hamas targets in Gaza.

Deir al-Balah IDF airstrike kills 18 members of same family including children

Guardian staff

An Israeli airstrike in Gaza has killed at least 18 people from the same family, even as mediators expressed optimism for an imminent ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas after 10 months of war.

The airstrike on Saturday hit a house and adjacent warehouse sheltering displaced people at the entrance to the town of al-Zawaida, according to al-Aqsa hospital in Deir al-Balah, where casualties were taken. An Associated Press reporter there counted those killed.

Among them was Sami Jawad al-Ejlah, a wholesaler who co-ordinated with the Israeli military to bring meat and fish to Gaza, as well as his two wives, 11 of their children aged two to 22, a grandmother to the children, and three other relatives, according to a list provided by the hospital.

Omar al-Dreemli, a relative, said: "We are in the morgue seeing indescribable scenes of limbs and severed heads and children who are dismembered." Abu Ahmed, a neighbour, said of Ejlah: "He was a peaceful man." He said more than 40 civilians had been sheltering in the house and warehouse at the time.

The Israeli military, which rarely comments on individual strikes, said it had struck "terrorist infrastructure" from where rockets had been fired toward Israel in recent weeks.

"Reports were received that as a result of the strike, civilians in an adjacent structure were killed. The incident is under review," it said.

▼ *Relatives mourn the family killed in an Israeli strike after their bodies were brought to al-Aqsa hospital* PHOTOGRAPH: ALI JADALLAH/ANADOLU/GETTY

Another mass evacuation was ordered for parts of central Gaza. An Israeli military spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, in a post on X, cited Palestinian rocket fire and said Palestinians in areas in and around the Maghazi refugee camp should leave.

Ahmad Omrani, one of those affected by the order, said: "The suffering began from the day we left our homes." As heavily laden vehicles, bikes and donkey carts weaved through the rubble, he said: "We suffer from fear and anxiety, and fear for the children playing in the street. You cannot sleep, sit or eat well."

Issa Murad, a Palestinian displaced to Deir al-Balah, said: "During each round of negotiations, they exert pressure by forcing evacuations and committing massacres."

The vast majority of Gaza's population has been displaced, often multiple times, and about 84% of the territory has been put under evacuation orders by the Israeli military, according to the UN.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed across the border on 7 October. About 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed 250 were abducted to Gaza. More than 100 hostages were released in a November ceasefire. About 110 are believed to still be in Gaza, and Israeli authorities believe about a third are dead.



▲ *A man at the hospital carries two children wounded in the strike*

> *'In the morgue are indescribable scenes of children who are dismembered'*
>
> **Omar al-Dreemli**
> *Relative of strike victims*

Israel says it has killed more than 17,000 Hamas militants, without providing evidence. Gaza's health ministry has said at least 40,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war. Thousands more are believed to be buried under the rubble and tens of thousands more have been injured.

Mediators have spent months pursuing a three-phase plan in which Hamas would release the remaining hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

The US president, Joe Biden, said on Friday that "we are closer than we have ever been" to a deal. But a senior Hamas official dismissed those comments on Saturday. "To say that we are getting close to a deal is an illusion," Sami Abu Zuhri told AFP. "We are not facing a deal or real negotiations, but rather the imposing of American diktats."

Additional reporting **Associated Press and Agence France-Presse**

Hezbollah

Fighting with Israel grows amid threat of retaliation

William Christou
Beirut

Fighting between Hezbollah and Israel intensified over the weekend despite diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions between the two and prevent an expected Hezbollah and Iranian attack against Israel.

On Saturday, Israel carried out one of bloodiest attacks against civilians since fighting began in October, killing 10 people, including Syrian workers and their family members, in what it said was a strike on a Hezbollah weapons depot in Nabatieh, southern Lebanon. Hezbollah responded with a 55-missile barrage at the town of Ayelet HaShahar in northern Israel.

Three Unifil peacekeepers were also slightly injured in an explosion yesterday while on patrol in the Lebanese border town of Yarin. A Unifil source said they believed the peacekeepers were injured in a nearby Israeli airstrike but that they were still investigating the incident.

The threat of a full-scale war loomed larger than ever after 10 months of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, sparked by the latter launching rockets at Israel "in solidarity" with Hamas's 7 October attack.

Hezbollah and Iran have vowed revenge against Israel for the assassination of Hezbollah's military chief of staff, Fuad Shukr, in Beirut and Hamas's political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran. Israel has not claimed responsibility for Haniyeh's death but is widely believed to be responsible.

Hezbollah released a video on Friday showcasing missile-laden trucks driving through an allegedly city-sized tunnel network, the first time the group revealed its tunnel network on camera.

"The enemy [Israel] wants a war and is always attempting to pressure us, so we are ready for all possibilities," a Hezbollah source said. They added that the group's rocket capabilities were "very large" and what was displayed in Friday's video was just "a drop in the ocean of what Hezbollah possesses".

The US and other western powers have been engaged in furious diplomacy since the dual assassinations, urging de-escalation. The US envoy Amos Hochstein visited Tel Aviv and Beirut last week, while emergency talks to forge a ceasefire in Gaza were held in Doha over the weekend.

But western diplomats in Beirut say they are in the dark about Hezbollah's threatened retaliation against Israel. In public, the media-savvy group has also been unusually silent. Hassan Nasrallah, the group's general secretary, has said that the anticipation of an attack is "part of the punishment" against Israel.

Neither the UK nor the US can speak directly with Hezbollah officials but instead pass messages through intermediaries in the Lebanese government or the Amal political party, Hezbollah's ally. This further complicats western efforts to judge the group's thinking.

The credibility of Hochstein, the diplomat leading efforts to stop fighting between Hezbollah and Israel, has also taken a hit in Lebanon. Hezbollah-affiliated media accused the US envoy of "deceiving" Lebanese officials by providing false assurances in the run-up to the assassination of Shukr. "Hezbollah does not view Hochstein as a trustworthy negotiator," Kassem Kassir, an analyst close to Hezbollah, said.

The Doha talks were convened last week in large part to head off an attack by Hezbollah and Iran, which have both said that fighting was designed to pressure Israel into a ceasefire in Gaza.

While the talks seemed to have postponed a retaliation against Israel, Hezbollah has said an attack was still to come regardless of a ceasefire.

Nasrallah's deputy, Naim Qassem, insisted on Thursday that a response was "completely separate" to fighting in Gaza and would be carried out - though the group would otherwise cease operations against Israel in the case of a ceasefire.

The UK and French foreign ministers, David Lammy and Stéphane Séjourné, warned in the Observer yesterday that the region was witnessing a "perilous moment".

"One miscalculation, and the situation risks spiraling into an even deeper and more intractable conflict," they wrote.



▲ *Mourners carry the body of a Syrian worker who was killed in an Israeli strike on Nabatieh in which 10 people died* PHOTOGRAPH: WAEL HAMZEH/EPA

Emergency plan to avoid overcrowding in prisons 'could be enacted as soon as today'

Aletha Adu
Political correspondent

An emergency plan to avoid prison overcrowding could be enacted as soon as today, the Prison Officers' Association has said.

The longstanding measure, known as Operation Early Dawn, would allow defendants to be held in police cells until prison beds become available and may mean their court dates are delayed or adjourned at short notice.

Mark Fairhurst, the national chair of the POA, said the measure risked "clogging up police cells" and blamed the influx of rioters for increasing the pressure on prisons. The Observer revealed over the weekend that the operation was expected to start again this week, having been used for several days in May when prison capacity hit critical levels.

Fairhurst told BBC Radio 4's Broadcasting House yesterday: "Last week we had the biggest influx of new receptions I've seen for quite some time. We had 397 new receptions. As of Friday we only had 340 spaces left in the adult closed male estate, which is feeling the most pressure.

"I wouldn't be surprised if at some point tomorrow morning the Ministry of Justice would announce that Operation Early Dawn kicks in to play at some point next week, probably Tuesday onwards."

He added: "The pinch points at the moment are the north-east and the north-west, so it's likely that if you commit an offence in those areas you will be carted 100, 200 miles away from home to serve your sentence because there's simply very few spaces."

An internal document said prison escort staff would make assessments each day to check how many people being held by the police could be taken to scheduled court hearings, be released on bail or have their cases delayed. Operation Early Dawn was last triggered by the Conservative government in May.

340
The number of spaces left in adult closed male prisons as of Friday, according to the chair of the POA

Last week, Downing Street confirmed that rioters jailed for taking part in the violent disorder after the Southport stabbing attack could be released early owing to the prison overcrowding crisis.

More than 300 people have so far been remanded in custody for their part in riots that swept England after disinformation was circulated about the attack on 29 July that left three girls dead.

Separately, the government has urged people who have zombie knives and machetes to "do the right thing" and hand them in to police.

The policing minister, Diana Johnson, said people who did so would face no repercussions.

From 24 September, zombie-style knives and machetes will be added to a list of prohibited dangerous items that also includes butterfly knives, samurai swords and push daggers.

Johnson said: "There is no legitimate need for a weapon of this kind to be in our homes or on our streets. That is why we will continue to make sure the tightest restrictions are in place to limit the availability of these lethal weapons.

"Implementing a ban on zombie-style knives is just the first step in our ambitious, dedicated plan to halve knife crime within a decade, and will closely be followed by making ninja swords illegal.

"We cannot do this alone: political, policing and community leaders must work together to bring the knife crime epidemic to an end and offer a better future for our young people."



Light the way
Hundreds of people light up the path to the summit of Cat Bells in the Lake District to raise money for the Michelle Jurd Trust, a charity ensuring local young people benefit from adventure opportunities.

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON/ ALAMY LIVE NEWS



English universities' 'golden age' could be over, says watchdog

Caroline Davies

The head of the universities watchdog in England has said the "golden age of higher education" could be over and all options should be on the table as the funding crisis facing the sector is "significant".

The Office for Students (OFS) interim chair, Sir David Behan, said increased tuition fees and lifting visa restrictions on international students could help revive institutions.

"I think the resilience of the sector overall has been tested by a number of different forces … the global pandemic, the impact of leaving the European Union," he told the Sunday Times.

"We've had industrial action, the cost of living crisis, the increasing cost of pensions and decreasing number of international students, and then, finally, domestic undergraduate fees remaining frozen since 2012."

He called on universities to explore mergers or partnerships with other institutions, amid fears some could be facing bankruptcy. "It's important that universities revise their medium-term financial strategies … they can't just carry on," he said.

Asked whether the government should look at increasing tuition fees or lifting postgraduate visa restrictions, Behan said: "If we're going to mitigate these risks to this sector, we need to look at all these possibilities as … we approach the budget in October there needs to be consideration of what the options are to secure the financial sustainability of the sector."

University leaders have been calling for the annual tuition fee for domestic students to rise in line with inflation to help institutions that are struggling financially.

The Conservative government raised the cap on university tuition fees in England to £9,000 a year in 2012, but it has been fixed at £9,250 since 2017.

Universities say costs have soared because of energy bills, inflation and compensation for students affected by lecturers' strikes over pay and pensions. To boost their income, they have enrolled heavily from countries such as China, India and Nigeria, whose students pay up to £38,000 a year in tuition fees, but the recent restrictions on visas for overseas students has had an impact.

Thousands of graduates received their A-level results on Thursday when the education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, said any large increase in tuition fees in the next five years would be "unpalatable".

She told Sky News: "I do recognise the challenge, and I hear that message from institutions as well, but I think that's a really unpalatable thing to be considering.

"Not least because I know that lots of students across the country are already facing big challenges around the cost of living, housing costs."

UK's remaining Ted Baker stores to close with 500 jobs at risk

Sarah Butler

Fashion brand Ted Baker's remaining 31 stores in the UK are to close this week, putting more than 500 jobs at risk at the company after its UK arm went into administration in March.

The brand had already shut 15 of its UK shops, resulting in about 245 staff being made redundant. However, it is understood that the retailer's remaining stores will close this week. The brand will continue to be available via wholesale partners such as John Lewis and House of Fraser.

Ted Baker has been struggling for several years in the face of increasing competition, a shift to online trading and the fallout from the exit of founder Ray Kelvin, who stepped down in 2019 after allegations of "forced hugging".

The UK fashion industry has had a tough year after an unseasonably cold spring and early summer, while the cost of living crisis has dampened spending on non-essentials.

The brand's final store closures, expected to be completed by tomorrow, come two years after US-based Authentic Brands Group bought the brand for a cut-price £211m, operating its British arm under the firm's No Ordinary Designer Label division (NODL).

Authentic Brands, the firm behind a number of fashion labels, including Juicy Couture and Reebok, still owns Ted Baker's intellectual property. It had been searching for a new partner to run the retail and online business in the UK and Europe. Sports Direct founder Mike Ashley's Frasers Group had been a frontrunner, but talks are understood to have fallen through.

Sky News reported yesterday that talks to find a potential future licensing partnership had stalled.

‘I love this country’

Hero who tackled knife attack suspect longs to stay in UK

Neha Gohil
Community affairs correspondent

Two weeks ago Abdullah, a Pakistani man living in the UK, was watching the news in fear. Far-right rioting had spread across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with mosques attacked and hotels housing asylum seekers set alight.

After a horrific knife attack on children in Southport last month, disinformation spread quickly on social media falsely claiming the perpetrator was a Muslim seeking asylum in the UK.

“Everyone was concerned, scared. They were scared of going to the mosque. They were not able to do their religious obligations,” said the security guard, who lives in London. “Especially my friends who are living in Manchester and in the north, they were more concerned because there were more protests there.”

Little did Abdullah know that just days after the riots had appeared to subside, he would be at the centre of another appalling story involving an attack on a child. But the 29-year-old was not to be a blame figure, rather one praised for his bravery and selflessness.



▲ *Police officers stand guard after the knife attack in Leicester Square*

The incident in London’s Leicester Square left a 34-year-old mother and her 11-year-old daughter in hospital, the latter with serious stab wounds.

Abdullah, who was guarding the nearby TWG tea shop, tackled a 32-year-old man who has since been charged with attempted murder. After the suspect’s arrest, TV crews interviewed Abdullah about the scenes that had unfolded before him, and in which he had bravely intervened.

Abdullah came to the UK to study for a master’s degree in project management after growing up in Abbottabad, northern Pakistan. He is the youngest of seven children.

He describes his life in London with fondness: “It’s really beautiful. The roads are clean, there’s proper infrastructure,” he said. “The parks and greenery are amazing. I’m always impressed with the skyscrapers.”

Despite aspiring to a career in project management, he was unable to secure a job in the industry and began work as a security guard in December on a post-study work visa.

“I’m protecting people. I’m protecting the staff in the shop from shoplifters. I really enjoy my job,” he said.

Yet, when far-right violence flared earlier this month, Abdullah was left concerned for his and his community’s safety and security.

More than 1,000 people have since been arrested and 575 charged in connection with the riots, in which people targeted mosques, shouted Islamophobic chants and hurled missiles at police officers. It was the worst disorder in the UK in more than a decade.

Keir Starmer condemned the riots as “far-right thuggery” and urged social media companies to tackle the spread of disinformation.

Abdullah described his gratitude at the outpouring of appreciation and praise that he has received since the incident, including being recognised for his bravery at the high commission of Pakistan.

“They’re saying: ‘Well done, Abdullah, hero of Leicester Square,’” he said. “All of my relatives, friends are going to my home and meeting my parents, my siblings. It’s just like Eid, people are coming there and celebrating like: ‘Your son has made our whole country proud.’”

He added: “After the incident, it’s proved that we Muslims, we Pakistanis, we Asians are peaceful. We are here to save people. We are here to protect the English community, our own community. This is our country, we came here as a choice so we are protectors, not attackers.”

He said he hoped to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK and secure a job in project management, adding; “I would love to stay in this country because I love this country.”

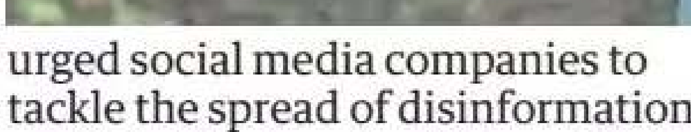
The Conservative peer Aamer Sarfraz described Abdullah as a “real-life hero” whose “actions have single-handedly shut down the narrative of the far-right protesters”.

“His bravery also sheds light on the largely unsung workforce of security guards who protect us every day without ever really being recognised,” Lord Sarfraz added.

Ioan Pintaru appeared at Westminster magistrates court on Tuesday charged with attempted murder and possession of a bladed article in a public place.

Pintaru, a Romanian citizen of no fixed address, was remanded in custody and will appear at the Old Bailey on 10 September.





▲ *Abdullah, 29, came to the UK from Pakistan to study for a master’s degree in project management*
PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN/THE GUARDIAN

Nautical one-liner voted funniest joke of Edinburgh festival fringe

Cash Boyle

A joke by the comedian Mark Simmons has been voted the funniest of this year’s Edinburgh festival fringe from a shortlist chosen by a panel of UK comedy critics.

Simmons, who got into comedy more than a decade ago after his friend convinced him to do an open mic night, won the TV channel U&Dave’s funniest joke of the fringe award with: “I was going to sail around the globe in the world’s smallest ship but I bottled it.”

The joke, taken from his PBH’s Free Fringe show at Liquid Room Annexe, was included in a shortlist of 15 one-liners put to 2,000 members of the British public.

Of those surveyed, 40% voted for Simmons’s gag as their No 1, meaning he now joins the likes of Tim Vine, Stewart Francis and Zoe Lyons as a winner of the award, which is in its 15th year.

He has certainly earned it. After kicking off his solo Edinburgh fringe journey back in 2014, Simmons’s gags have placed ninth, sixth and second in previous votes.

The comedian said he was “really chuffed” to win. “I needed some good news as I was just fired from my job marking exam papers. Can’t understand it, I always gave 110%.”

Cherie Hall, U&Dave’s channel director, said: “This year’s Top 15 list features a hilarious blend of jokes that are sure to keep us laughing until the next joke of the fringe.”

Simmons’s show, More Jokes, is running until Saturday.

Other gags in the running

I’ve been taking salsa lessons for months, but I just don’t feel like I’m progressing. It’s just one step forward … two steps back. *Alec Snook*

Ate horse at a restaurant once – wasn’t great. Starter was all right but the mane was dreadful. *Alex Kitson*

I sailed through my driving test. That’s why I failed it. *Arthur Smith*

My dad used to say to me: “Pints, gallons, litres” – which, I think, speaks volumes. *Olaf Falafel*

I love the Olympics. My friend and I invented a new type of relay baton: well, he came up with the idea, I ran with it. *Mark Simmons*

British etiquette is confusing. Why is it highbrow to look at boobs in an art gallery but lowbrow when I get them out in Spoons? *Chelsea Birkby*

My partner told me that she’d never seen the film Gaslight. I told her that she definitely had. *Zoë Coombs Marr*

I’m an extremely emotionally needy non-binary person: my pronouns are “there there”. *Sarah Keyworth*

Keir Starmer looks like an AI-generated image of a substitute teacher. *Sophie Duker*

News
Alain Delon
1935-2024

'Unearthly perfection'

Mesmeric actor of diabolical beauty and eerie charisma

Peter Bradshaw
Guardian film critic

There is a famous photograph of Alain Delon in 1967, sitting on a couch next to Marianne Faithfull, with a subdued Mick Jagger beside her, apparently taken around the time Faithfull was about to star in The Girl on a Motorcycle.

Faithfull is leaning over intimately as Delon murmurs to her, laughing, her body language entirely enfolded into his. Jagger can only look down uneasily at his cigarette. Later Faithfull would say that she didn't fancy Delon, but confirmed Jagger was very jealous.

It is hard to think of anyone who could have upstaged Jagger at that moment, who could have drawn the gaze of Faithfull and the press cameras to him. But that is Delon, in all his eerie, heartstopping, almost extraterrestrial gorgeousness. He was one of the most - maybe the most - beautiful male stars in cinema history.

Delon, who has died aged 88, had a mesmerically demure, long-lashed, almost feline look that could indicate something mysterious, or wounded, or malign. He had an unlocatable charisma to go with his beauty, the dangerous apparent passivity and stillness of a predator, and it was this that got him cast in some of the most fascinating crime pictures of the era (by René Clément, Jacques Deray and Jean-Pierre Melville) as well as the bold new Italian art cinema of Visconti and Antonioni. It was his exquisite face that made him such an exotic figure in working-class stories or lowlife dramas.

In his breakthrough movie, Delon played Rocco in Visconti's Rocco and His Brothers in 1960. He is the brother who comes to Milan to be with his extended family of siblings and start a new aspirational life, but ends up tragically sacrificing his own wellbeing for his brothers. A more quintessential Delon role came in the same year: Tom Ripley in Plein Soleil, or Purple Noon, Clément's adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's The Talented Mr Ripley. I've always thought Delon's unearthly perfection is itself creepy, as if he is imitating a human being. This is a man, you think, who has grown used to a dazed, rapt expression on the faces of people talking to him, accustomed to their awe, and yet with a diabolical insight into how that magnetism can be harnessed to manipulate and coerce.

He was enigmatic and difficult in Antonioni's L'Eclisse (The Eclipse) in 1962, as the nervy and conceited young stockbroker who embarks on an affair with Monica Vitti (one of the few female co-stars who could match Delon's beauty and sphinx-life refusal to disclose an inner emotional life).

But it was in the crime pictures of Melville that Delon's image became more iconic. He starred in Le Samouraï (1967), The Red Circle (1970) and the underrated Un Flic (1972). In the first two of these, he is the villain, in the third the police officer, but always with that impassive, enigmatically enclosed self-possession. In Le Samouraï he is the cool, unsmiling hitman with the Anglicised name of Jef (just the one "f") Costello. This killer has a monkish vocation for killing and there is something ascetic in Costello that corresponds to Delon's willingness simply to impress his personality on the camera, like a silent film actor.

My vote, though, for Delon's greatest role, and greatest Delon achievement, is Joseph Losey's Kafka-esque doppelganger mystery Monsieur Klein from 1976. Delon produced the movie and played Klein, a wealthy art dealer in occupied Paris. He has no great problems with the Nazis, especially as they are boosting his business. Terrified Jewish people are coming to him, offering paintings for sale to fund their escape from France, and Klein exploits their desperation to get bargains. But then he starts getting a Jewish newsletter delivered: evidently there is someone else with his name, a Jew, and a terrible mistake has been made … hasn't it? Or is it someone trying to discredit him? Klein goes to the police to point this out, but then worries they will think he is a Jew. He is unable to complain forcefully because of a fear that will merely make him look guilty.

There is a genius to his performance when he humiliates a Jewish customer by getting a cut-price picture and on the way out, this man points out the newsletter on his mat - like the ones he himself gets. Delon's face flickers with fear, astonishment, distaste, panic and a clear sense that to betray any emotion would be a defeat. In a way, this is his masterpiece.

Alain Delon was to become notorious for his admiration for the Front National and (like Sean Connery) for some odious remarks about slapping women. But he redeemed himself, politically, for his support for Losey and the study of antisemitism that was Monsieur Klein. He was an icon, and a symbol of the lost beauty of the 1960s.

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▲ *Delon with Marianne Faithfull and an upstaged Mick Jagger*

Tributes
'A French monument'

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, and the film star Brigitte Bardot led tributes to Alain Delon, who has died aged 88.

In a statement yesterday, his family wrote: "Alain Fabien, Anouchka, Anthony, as well as [his dog] Loubo, are deeply saddened to announce the passing of their father. He passed away peacefully in his home in Douchy, surrounded by his three children and family."

Identified with French cinema's resurgence in the 1960s, Delon played a string of cops, hitmen and beautifully chiselled chancers for some of the country's greatest directors, including Jean-Pierre Melville, René Clément and Jacques Deray.

Macron wrote on X that Delon "made the world dream … he offered his unforgettable face to shake our lives". He added: "He was more than a star. He was a French monument."

Bardot, 89, who starred with Delon in the 1961 film Amours Célèbres, and who now runs an animal protection foundation, was said to be "devastated" by his death.

"Today, it is with a heavy heart we learn of Alain Delon's death. He was an exceptional man, an unforgettable artist and a great friend to animals," the Brigitte Bardot Foundation said.

"Alain was a close friend of our president, Brigitte Bardot, who is devastated by his death."

France's culture minister, Rachida Dati, wrote: "We believe he was immortal … his talent, his charisma, his aura made him destined for a Hollywood career at a young age, but he chose France."

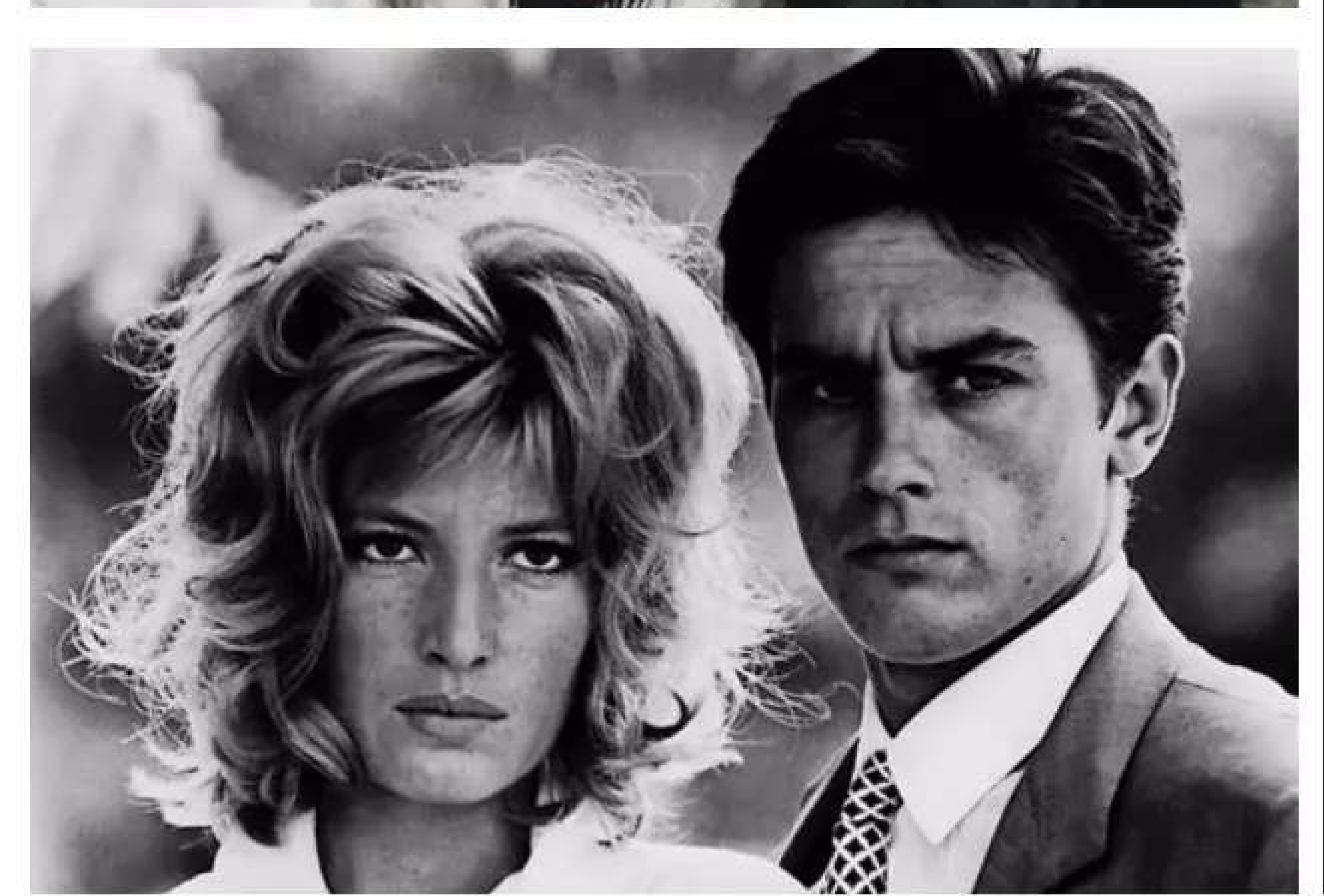
Andrew Pulver and Kim Willsher













Clockwise from left: Delon with Ursula Andress in Soleil Rouge, 1971; with Jeanne Moreau, left, and Sophia Loren in 1989; with Monica Vitti in L'Eclisse, 1962; and in Les Amours Célèbres with Brigitte Bardot, 1961 Right: with Carla Marlier in Melodie en Sous-Sol, 1963

PHOTOGRAPHS: IMPRESS/AVALON; REMY DE LA MAUVINIÈRE/AP; EYEVINE; PARIS MATCH/GETTY IMAGES; RONALD GRANT

'He didn't play the star here'

A 'jovial' village life, but family strains cast shadow

Kim Willsher
Douchy

It has been some time since Alain Delon was last seen in Douchy, his country home for the past half a century and the place he designated as his final resting place. Local people remember when back in the 70s and 80s he would be spotted at the village's chemist or the only restaurant, or even at the annual school fete with Mireille Darc, an actor and one of the great loves of his life.

"When I was a schoolgirl they would come for the end-of-year party. They would play Father Christmas and give everyone a present," one woman recalled.

Christian, a florist, remembered delivering the actor's favourite flowers - red and white roses and white lilies - to the estate known as La Brûlerie.

"He was always very jovial and liked a joke but he wasn't a showoff. He didn't play the star or artist here. He was considered a local," he said.

Yesterday, the Douchyssois, as they are known, turned out to say adieu to their most famous resident after learning of Delon's death aged 88, and lay flowers at the wrought-iron gate of the home where he had lived as a recluse with failing health for the last year.

It was here, 85 miles south-east of Paris, that Delon had declared he wished to be buried, near the chapel built in a cemetery he created for more than 30 of his beloved dogs. And it was here that after months of public infighting, Delon's children sat down united in grief to compose a joint statement.

"Alain-Fabien, Anouchka, Anthony, as well as [his dog] Loubo, are deeply saddened to announce the passing of their father. He passed away peacefully in his home in Douchy, surrounded by his three children and his family," they said in a statement, adding that the family asked for privacy.





Alain Delon with his wife, Nathalie, and two-month-old son, Anthony, in 1964. Above, with his daughter Anouchka in Cannes in 2019

Delon was to witness sibling tensions erupt at the beginning of this year when, severely diminished by a stroke in 2019 and a slow-developing lymphoma diagnosed in 2022, he was at the centre of a flurry of bitter accusations, squabbles involving secret recordings and threats of legal action.

It was hinted at - and hoped for - that the actor's health was so fragile he was largely unaware of the Shakespearean tragedy unfolding as the three evicted Delon's Japanese companion, Hiromi Rollin, from the property a year ago and paraded their grievances in the press and on television.

Delon had a famously stormy relationship with his two sons, Anthony, 59, whose mother, Nathalie, was his only wife, and Alain-Fabien, 30, whose mother is Rosalie van Breemen, a Dutch model and journalist. Le Monde suggested Delon's own turbulent childhood left him incapable of establishing relationships with his sons. Delon was four when his parents divorced and he was sent to a foster home.

The actor made no secret that he favoured his daughter, Anouchka, 33, whose mother is also Breemen, and who lives in Switzerland. "To no other woman have I so often said I love you," he said in 2008, adding a decade later: "I have a daughter who is the love of my life, perhaps a little too much with regard to the others."

A third son, Christian Aaron Boulogne, known as Ari, born to the German rock star Nico of the Velvet Underground and whom the actor never recognised as his son, was partly raised by Delon's mother. He died in 2023 aged 60 after long-term drug addiction.

Before Delon's death, the family confirmed that in line with French law - under which a parent cannot disinherit their children, however estranged or conflicted the relationship - his estate, which wildly varying estimates put at between €50m and €300m (£58m and £352m), would be divided into quarters with a required 25% going to each child.

The actor was free to decide what to do with the final 25% and has reportedly left it to Anouchka, giving her half of his fortune in total. Delon's children have publicly said they do not contest the inequitable disbursement, insisting their feud was not about money. In February, Anthony said: "There is no inheritance war."

In French media, Delon had the last word. In a 1996 question-and-answer sequence with the TV presenter Bernard Pivot, the actor was asked: "If God exists, what would you like to hear him say to you after your death?"

Without hesitation, Delon replied: "Since this is your greatest and deepest regret, I know, come, I'll take you to your father and mother, so that for the first time, at last, you can see them together."

Cooper pledges to include misogyny in crackdown on 'pushing hateful beliefs'

Aletha Adu
Nadeem Badshah

The home secretary, Yvette Cooper, vowed yesterday to crack down on people "pushing harmful and hateful beliefs", including extreme misogyny, as she announced a new approach to fighting extremism.

The Home Office has commissioned a rapid review to inform a new government counter-extremism strategy on how best to tackle the threat posed by extremist ideologies online and offline.

The review will assess the ideological spectrum and is intended to address "gaps in the current system" that leave the country exposed to hateful or harmful activity that promotes violence or undermines democracy.

Officials will assess "the rise of Islamist and far-right extremism" alongside "ideological trends" that have gained traction including extreme misogyny. The scheme also aims to assess the causes and conduct of radicalisation of young people online and offline.

Cooper has previously said the last government's counter-extremism strategy was nine years out of date. She believes the review will lay the foundations for Labour to deliver on its manifesto promise of preventing people from being drawn towards hateful ideologies.

It comes after a decade of warnings from the police and former government advisers about the need to address the rise of hateful extremism and the proliferation of dangerous material online.

Last week Dame Sara Khan – who was Rishi Sunak's independent adviser on social cohesion and resilience until May and acted as a counter-extremism commissioner under Theresa May and Boris Johnson – said the Tory government had left Britain wide open to far-right violence by ignoring red flags and stoking fires with a culture war agenda.

In a damning intervention, she told the Guardian: "The writing was clearly on the wall for some time. All my reports have shown, in a nutshell, that firstly these extremist and cohesion threats are worsening; secondly that our country is woefully unprepared."



▲ *Yvette Cooper announced a new approach to tackling extremism*

Cooper said: "For too long governments have failed to address the rise in extremism, both online and on our streets, and we've seen the number of young people radicalised online grow. Hateful incitement of all kinds fractures and frays the very fabric of our communities and our democracy.

"Action against extremism has been badly hollowed out in recent years, just when it should have been needed most.

"That's why I have directed the Home Office to conduct a rapid analytical sprint on extremism, to map and monitor extremist trends, to understand the evidence about what works to disrupt and divert people away from extremist views, and to identify any gaps in existing policy which need to be addressed to crack down on those pushing harmful and hateful beliefs and violence."

The Home Office minister Jess Phillips, responding to concerns that treating misogyny as extremism could criminalise free speech, told LBC: "You just use the exact same test you would with far-right extremism and Islamism, wouldn't you? The same test would have to apply …

"It's not OK any more to ignore the massive growing threat caused by online hatred towards women and for us to ignore it because we're worried about the line, rather than making sure the line is in the right place, as we would do with any other extremist ideology."



'Hidden treasure'

Mystery remains after discovery of vaults under new museum



Esther Addley

When a contractor working on the site of the new London Museum at Smithfield market knocked a tentative hole in a bricked-up basement wall, all he could see, peering in with a torch, was a muddy pile of rubble and some scurrying rats.

But behind the wall, once the detritus had been carefully removed, the architects and builders were astonished to find an enormous and beautifully constructed network of brick vaults that no one, even a year into the ambitious £150m project, had known were there.

There had been hints on old plans of some underground structures, "but because everything was blocked in and bricked up, we had no idea that they still existed", said Paul Williams, principal director of the lead architects, Stanton Williams.

Certainly nothing had suggested the sheer scale of the surviving Victorian vaults, a labyrinthine forest of carefully hand-built arches and columns which stretch to 800 sq metres (8,600 sq ft), an area bigger than three tennis courts – all hiding in one of the busiest parts of central London.

If breaking through the wall was "a little bit Indiana Jones", the discovery itself was "magical", said Williams. He was enchanted by the project to convert two historic former food markets at Smithfield, near Farringdon, into a new home for the Museum of London after the closure in 2022 of its previous home at the Barbican.

Part of the new museum, due to open in 2026, will be situated underground, at the same level as former Roman streets, the passing Crossrail trains (which will be visible to visitors through a window) and the hidden River Fleet which flows behind thick brick walls just metres away.

▲ *Joe Kenway, in charge of the scheme's project management, in the vaults underneath Smithfield market, above left. Right, old basement plans*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALICIA CANTER/ THE GUARDIAN

"Every thing we do, this whole project, is about imagination," said Williams. "If anything triggers the imagination, it's trains, it's the Romans, it's vaults you can't find. It's about hidden treasure, which is so right for the London Museum."

Having had some time to research the vaults, the museum's senior curator of archaeology, Francis Grew, knows a little more about their history and purpose.

They were built along with the general market in the 1880s, partly to help hold up the busy Farringdon Road above, but also, he thinks, as storage space for the huge volumes of goods that were coming in and out of the markets on what was the busiest stretch of railway in Britain.

"But one of the most curious things is exactly what these vaults were intended to be used for," said Grew. "That's where the real mystery and the interest and the excitement is – they're still not fully disclosing their past history."

Fruit, vegetables, meat and textiles were probably kept there, he said – but the vaults may even have been used as stabling for the many packhorses that worked at the markets.

Their meticulous construction is more than just structural. Williams points to the use of rounded, lighter coloured bricks on every column edge, which he believes would have helped porters navigate the underground maze in poor light. "This is cathedral[-level] building. It's remarkable."

Finding the vaults may have been a delight, but it also caused a huge headache: they were not incorporated into the ambitious scheme that had won its architects the renovation contract, and certainly did not appear on any budget. "We were shocked in the first instance, and very quickly then racking our brains thinking: what do we do about this challenge?" said Joe Kenway, who leads the scheme's project management on behalf of the museum.

Ultimately, they felt they could not ignore the opportunity, and additional funding was sourced from the City of London Corporation to incorporate the vaults into the museum plans.

Five years afters that first breakthrough moment, the vaults' huge expanse of brickwork has been meticulously restored and the floors and lighting are about to go in. Eventually, visitors will be able to explore the space, though initial plans are to use it for pop-up events such as immersive theatre or large-scale dinners rather than the permanent collection, said Kenway.

"I think, for the museum, this really deserves to become one of London's really special places," he said. "Loads of people that we speak to on the project have family connections to people who have worked in the Smithfield area spanning back over quite a long history. And I think by making this space accessible to the public, we will be giving those people, and national and international visitors, the opportunity to connect with this really special part of the city."

Brexit regulations force fledgling cargo airline to fly to US for routine servicing

Lisa O'Carroll

A fledgling British cargo airline has told how Brexit red tape has forced it to go as far as the US for routine servicing and repairs at huge environmental and financial costs.

The chief executive of One Air, Chris Hope, said the last government failed to do any Brexit impact assessment for aviation and the sector was concerned Labour would make a similar "mysterious" omission when it opened talks with the European Union about a reset in the cross-Channel trading relationship.

The company has criticised post-Brexit rules that require British pilots to be formally re-examined for identical qualifications in the EU at a substantial cost, while engineers' hard-earned licences are rendered practically worthless outside Britain.

Part of the problem is the lack of mutual recognition for those with professional qualifications between the EU and the UK, something that also causes problems for architects and accountants. But One Air's problem is compounded by its position as the only company in the UK operating Boeing 747s.

Servicing and maintenance infrastructure for the aircraft is fast disappearing as passenger airlines switch to Airbus after the pandemic.

> *'If repairs are done in a workshop in the EU, unless that firm has been UK-approved it can't be used'*
>
> **Chris Hope**
> *Chief executive, One Air*

As part of the Brexit arrangement, EU-based aircraft engineering companies in the bloc could apply to be recognised in the UK before the end of 2022 but there were no takers for 747s.

It means One Air is forced to fight for slots in the one repair workshop in Germany recognised in the UK or go to the US for the work to be done.

"In the seven months of this calendar year so far, we've had two [services] that had to go to the US. The kind of incremental cost difference is approaching $500,000 [£390,000] for each of them," Hope said, resulting in costs so far of £780,000.

"It is possible for [EU] organisations to get UK approval but … they would have to apply to the UK as if they were a new operator and it is duplicate regulations, which is very involved. The cost and time of doing that is quite prohibitive to potentially service a two- or three-aircraft fleet."

Similar issues have occurred in the industrial chemical industry, with huge costs linked to compliance to two sets of rules, both stemming from the same original EU legislation.

The UK has a bilateral deal with the US, something the aviation industry hopes could be a model for a reset in relations with the EU.

Aircraft have to be serviced every three months, which takes a week at a time, with a longer check - taking a month - every two years.

But routine repairs are also a problem as components can only be put in UK aircraft if they are UK-approved or covered by the UK's deal with the US.

Hope said: "If it is completed by a workshop in the EU, unless that company has been UK-approved, it can't be used and that has significant impact."

Pilots were another issue, with British qualifications "seriously degraded" by Brexit because they were no longer recognised by the EU.

The Cabinet Office was approached for comment.



▲ *People watch a street performer on the Royal Mile as part of the Edinburgh festival fringe yesterday*
PHOTOGRAPH: ARCH WHITE/ALAMY

Bank holiday roads likely to be busiest in a decade, warns RAC

Sarah Butler

Britain is set for the busiest August bank holiday getaway on the roads in nearly a decade, with severe delays expected on routes towards the Leeds and Reading music festivals, and despite overseas tourists continuing to stay away.

An estimated 19.2m leisure journeys by car are expected over the weekend, according to the RAC - the highest level since the breakdown services company began recording traffic data in 2015.

Saturday is expected to be the busiest on the roads, with 3.7m getaway trips planned, slightly ahead of the 3m planned each day over the rest of the weekend. A further 6.2m trips are planned at some point over the weekend, with drivers undecided exactly when they will travel. The vast majority of the outings will be day trips, according to the RAC's research.

Alice Simpson, the RAC's breakdown spokesperson, said: "Whether you're off to a festival, the coast or a theme park, or meeting up with friends and family elsewhere, the usual advice applies: leave as early as you can to avoid the jams or be prepared to sit in some lengthy queues."

While Britons are getting back on the road, the number of overseas visitors to the UK this year is expected to remain 5% below pre-pandemic levels at 38.7 million, according to a separate report today.

The Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) said that while overseas visitor numbers were up on the 38 million who arrived last year, travellers were spending less per capita while in the country, if inflation was taken into account.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show overseas visitors spent £31.1bn in the UK last year. VisitBritain expects this figure to rise to £32.5bn this year, compared with pre-pandemic levels of £28.4bn recorded in 2019.

> **19.2m**
> *Estimated leisure journeys by car over the August bank holiday weekend, according to the RAC*

However, the CEBR said that adjusting for inflation would mean overall tourist spending remained 8% lower than the figure recorded in 2019 - equivalent to a £2.8bn "hole" in tourist spending.

It warned that spending was being dampened by a mix of post-Brexit travel barriers, the removal of tax-free shopping for tourists and concerns about the recent far-right riots that led to some countries issuing advice to their citizens regarding the safety of travelling to the UK.

The CEBR said the UK had also become comparatively more expensive for some visitors after a dramatic increase in the prices of accommodation, dining out and air fares.

A rise in the value of the pound against the euro and Chinese yuan had also reduced the purchasing power of overseas tourists. Visitors from the US, however, have benefited from a stronger dollar.

Despite the difficulties for tourists, the Port of Dover expects more than 20,000 cars to travel through it over the bank holiday weekend. Peak hours are expected to be between 6am and 1pm each day.

Packaging warning after woman dies after eating detergent pod

Caroline Davies

A coroner has issued a warning after a 93-year-old woman with dementia died after eating toxic laundry capsules she may have mistaken for sweets due to their bright packaging.

Elizabeth Van Der-Drift died from a combination of aspiration pneumonia, ingesting the laundry tablets and dementia on 19 March. A carer told the inquest into her death that the capsules' packaging "bore more than a passing resemblance to a bag of sweets", according to a prevention of future deaths report (PFD).

The coroner Ian Potter warned that product safety regulations might pay "insufficient regard" to the risks posed to people with dementia.

Potter, an assistant coroner for inner north London, said in the PFD: "It has long been acknowledged that products of this nature can pose risks to children; however, there appears to be less acknowledgment of the risks posed to those with dementia or other forms of cognitive impairment."

He said the "bright, eye-catching colours" of such capsules were an "industry-wide phenomenon". As a result, sending the warning to the individual manufacturer of the pods involved would be "shortsighted", Potter added.

Instead, the report was issued to the CEO of the Office for Product Safety and Standards, the secretary of state for health and social care, and the director general of the UK Cleaning Product Industry Association.

The coroner said he was "well aware" of the Food Imitations (Safety) Regulations 1989, but "it seems to me either the regulations themselves have insufficient regard to those living with dementia or other cognitive impairment or that the application of the regulations is not approached with sufficient rigour".



▲ *Elizabeth Van Der-Drift may have mistaken laundry tablets for sweets*

The regulations prohibit the supply of products that are unfit for human consumption but are likely to be mistaken for food, and explicitly mention the risk to children.

Van Der-Drift lived with dementia for "a number of years" and regularly could not remember when she had last eaten food, he said. She would often "go in search of something to eat" and on 13 or 14 March "gained access to laundry detergent tablets [or] pods that were brightly coloured" and "bit into at least one of them", he said. The inquest found that her death was accidental.

Inside G2
A new start after 60
Rosa Saito: 'I became a model at 69 after being spotted in the street'
Page 2 →



Black children still far more likely than white to be strip-searched

Continued *from page 1*

challenges, but there is still urgent work to be done: too many strip-searches carried out are unnecessary, unsafe and under-reported."

Mariner added: "Today's research serves as a stark reminder that this is not an isolated issue in the capital. A much higher threshold should be met before a child is subjected to what we know can be a traumatising search.

"We need a culture of trust to be built between children and the police, so it's vital that improvements continue, with fewer searches carried out, better data recording when they do, and that good practice and improvements are identified and modelled across the country."

Police promised a new review of the rules for when officers use their powers to stop a person: "We will also conduct a full review of our authorised professional practice in respect of stop and search. This detailed and wide-ranging review will seek to examine all aspects of stop and search, including strip-searches, and make any necessary changes to policing policy and national practices."

The Home Office says strip-searches play an important role in protecting the public and that strict safeguards are in place.

Dame Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner, said urgent procedural change was needed to tackle widespread racial disparity, and to ensure children were not left at risk during these intimate searches.

"Throughout England and Wales, police continue to strip-search children as part of stop and searches, revealing concerning practices and widespread failure to comply with safeguarding procedures designed to protect children.

"Senior police officers have shared with me that there will be certain, limited times when an immediate risk of harm means that a search of this nature is both appropriate and necessary.

"My firm recommendation is that this should only be the case where there is a clear and immediate danger to the child or others.

"However, the majority of searches are still conducted on suspicion of drugs and nearly half result in no further action.

She added: "Two years on from the shocking case of Child Q in 2022, we are seeing some green shoots of progress in how the police carry out and record strip-searches on children.

"Today's research serves as a stark reminder that this is not an isolated issue in the capital. A much higher threshold should be met before a child is subjected to a humiliating and traumatising intimate search."

Today's report is the third from De Souza in her work to investigate



▶ *People protesting outside Stoke Newington police station, London, in 2022 after it was revealed a 15-year-old black schoolgirl, known as Child Q, was strip-searched by officers*
PHOTOGRAPH: GUY SMALLMAN/ GETTY IMAGES

Child Q Disciplinary hearing may not occur until next year

Vikram Dodd
Police and crime correspondent

A date is still to be set for a disciplinary hearing that could result in three Metropolitan police officers being sacked for their alleged part in the strip-search of an innocent child in December 2020.

Child Q, 15, was strip-searched at her school in Hackney, east London, while menstruating, having been wrongly accused of a possessing cannabis. It was an experience she found traumatising and the incident has been widely condemned.

Three Met officers face disciplinary charges of gross misconduct after an investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). If found guilty, they could be sacked.

The Guardian understands that the three officers' responses to the charges against them, which were announced in September 2023, are



the use of strip-searching powers by police forces on children. It confirmed there are lower numbers of strip-searches overall, and especially in London, while the majority of police forces are reporting changes to procedures and a fall in the proportion of black children subjected to strip-searches between 2022 and 2023. But it still found widespread failure to comply with safeguarding processes designed to protect children during intimate searches.

Issues of concern in the report include that:

- Of strip-searched children between 2022 and 2023, 27% were black, while black children form 6% of the child population of England and Wales. For white children, the proportions were 59% and 74%. The report notes that this is an improvement on figures between 2018 and 2023.
- Between July 2022 and June 2023, a parent, carer or social worker could not be confirmed to be present in almost half (45%) of searches.
- During the same period the majority of searches - 88% - were conducted on suspicion of drugs, with just 6% on suspicion of carrying weapons or blades.
- The proportion of searches conducted involving a child aged 15 years or younger increased from 23% to 28% between July 2022 and June 2023.

De Souza's latest report said there were signs of improvement including lower numbers of strip-searches overall. In London especially, most police forces reported changes to procedures and a fall in the proportion of black children subjected to strip-searches between 2022 and 2023, compared with previous years and national population figures.

In her 2023 report, De Souza heard from a male victim of child criminal exploitation and county lines who was arrested multiple times between the ages of 13 and 18 and strip-searched up to four times in custody. He was first strip-searched in custody aged 13, without an appropriate adult present, having been arrested in school.

A Metropolitan police spokesperson said: "We have a duty to do everything we can to prevent children in London from being used in the supply of drugs or involved in knife crime as either victims or offenders.

"We know these searches are intrusive and should only be used where there is a risk of serious harm to the child or others, and where used we must ensure that children are protected and safeguarded.

"We introduced a new policy to improve these types of searches in May 2022, including the requirement of Inspector authorisation, mandatory safeguarding referrals and new guidance for officers."

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expected next month. In a rare move, the IOPC will instruct the lawyers presenting the case against them. Usually discipline cases involve the officers' own force instructing lawyers to prosecute the case against them. The IOPC hopes the hearing will be held before the end of this year, but it is possible the case will remain unheard into 2025.

Leroy Logan, a former Met superintendent and deputy borough commander for Hackney, condemned the delay. The former chair of the Met Black Police Association, said: "Justice delayed is justice denied. Child Q and her family need justice and a four- to five-year delay is scandalous. This is down to a lack of grip by senior leaders in the Met. It is in the public interest to have this case resolved as quickly as possible."

The allegations against the officers include that the strip-search was wrong, that no appropriate adult was present during it and that "Child Q was discriminated against by officers because of her race and sex", according to the IOPC.

A report by Hackney council said Child Q was pulled out of an exam, taken to a room, told to bend over, spread her legs and spread her buttocks with her hands while coughing.

The IOPC said it concluded its investigation in September 2023.

"Following this, we then made the decision to progress with disciplinary proceedings and liaised with the Met before deciding to use our powers to present this case to the disciplinary panel," it said.

"Our presenting unit was engaged in substantial case preparation work, which involved preparing detailed misconduct allegations and significant volumes of bundles of material and evidence gathered during the course of the investigation.

"The officers have been served with the gross misconduct papers and responses are due next month.

"A chair has been appointed and once responses are received they will then determine the length of the hearing and liaise with the parties involved to set a date."

Analysis
Vikram Dodd



Suspicions remain that powers to fight crime are being misused, leaving victims scarred

When is it reasonable, necessary and proportionate for agents of the state, such as police officers, to take actions that are likely to leave a child traumatised?

There is little dispute that compelling anyone to expose their intimate body parts to a stranger causes real emotional pain. But police believe strip-searching can be a useful tool.

The police believe the use of "plugging", where illegal drugs are secreted, increased with "county lines", with children used to move drugs from big cities to smaller towns. Young people have been lured or threatened by drugs gangs who believe police will be reluctant to target those aged under 18.

Today's report from the children's commissioner found in almost nine out of 10 strip-searches, officers gave suspicion of having drugs as the reason.

A spokesperson for the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) said: "Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is carrying unlawful items secreted on their person (eg drugs or weapons) and the items will not be voluntarily surrendered, then to ensure the child is not exposed to serious harm by allowing continued possession, a strip-search may be appropriate.

> *Today's report found that in almost nine out of 10 strip-searches, officers involved gave suspicion of having drugs as the reason*

"The police are under a positive duty to protect life and prevent an individual coming to serious harm or being subject of degrading treatment through the unlawful acts of another eg child criminal exploitation.

"To leave children in possession of illegal items that could threaten their life or safety may be in negligent breach of the child's human rights."

The report says that when young people are strip-searched, nothing is found in about half the cases. For all ages, evidence of a crime is found in 25% of cases, the police inspectorate reported last week.

Police use of strip-search powers carries an assessment, formal and informal, of the benefits versus the risks. After the Child Q scandal in 2022, it was clear police had been getting that balance wrong. The report also highlights racial disparity, with black children four times more likely to face strip-searches.

As the NPCC said when launching a plan to reform their record on race in 2022: "Black people are seven times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people and five times more likely to be subjected to the use of force … 10% of our recorded searches, 27% of use-of-force incidents and 35% of Taser incidents involved someone from a black ethnic group.

"The latest estimates suggest that only 3.5% of the population is black."

Some, including the NPCC chair, Gavin Stephens, believe this is explainable by institutional racism. Officially, police forces and most of his fellow chiefs do not accept this.

The report from the children's commissioner is the second in two months to raise serious concerns about the police power to strip-search people. The first looked specifically at Greater Manchester police and strip-searches of mainly adult women - it made scathing criticisms. The suspicion remains, given these two reports, that power granted to fight crime is at least in some cases being misused, with foreseeable scarring effects on the victims.

Non-contact version of American football on the offensive in UK

Robert Booth
Social affairs correspondent

Flag football, a non-contact version of American football, is rapidly catching on in the UK, with a surge in the number of schools involved and participation numbers likely to hit 100,000 by 2026.

Fuelled by an energetic campaign by the New York-based National Football League (NFL) to encourage young people in Britain to try it, teams such as the Northants Ducks, the South Coast Spitfires and the London Fruitbats are experiencing rising demand.

School PE teachers have also reported increased interest among children, driven by the game's rising global profile and parents' concerns that rugby and full-contact American football pose too great a risk of brain injury. A total of 343 schools entered events for the UK NFL Flag National Championship this year, an annual increase of 78%.

"In the last three years it has gone berserk," said Jay Taylor, who founded the Fruitbats flag football club in Ealing. "Flag football has a chance of sticking here, because there is nothing like it."

The profile of flag football has been boosted by the International Olympic Committee's decision to include the sport for the first time at the 2028 Los Angeles Games and by the NFL's switch of its end-of-season showpiece Pro Bowl match from full contact to flag.

It is one of several fast-growing new sports in the UK. Pickleball, a version of short tennis using a solid bat, has become hugely popular in California and is catching on fast from Cornwall to Newcastle. Padel, a cross between tennis and squash, beloved of professional footballers, is also spreading, with the former Wimbledon champion Andy Murray among those opening new courts.

Flag football is a version of the American football in which defenders make "tackles" by grabbing a fabric "flag" attached by Velcro on every player's belt. Instead of 11 fully armoured players on the pitch for each side, five to seven take the field in just shorts, T-shirts and trainers.

The principles of the game are the same as in the full-contact version: the offence tries to advance the ball through a series of planned plays while the defence tries to stop them.

The Fruitbats already have 70 players aged 14 and under. A significant draw appears to be the NFL's annual invitation to the best school teams to compete in an international tournament in Florida.

Taylor said the NFL and several of its professional teams were also quick to support schools and clubs by offering balls and flag belts.



▲ *Leia, Jacob and their teammates are due to compete at the Flag World Championships in Florida in 2025*
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME ROBERTSON/THE GUARDIAN

> **'It has gone berserk. Flag football has a chance of sticking here, because there is nothing like it'**
>
> **Jay Taylor** *London Fruitbats founder*

The Jacksonville Jaguars have been promoting "JagTag" in the UK for several years. This year the New York Jets, owned by Donald Trump's former ambassador to the UK, Woody Johnson, and the Chicago Bears announced an expansion of their girls' tag football league in the UK.

Jacob and Leia, both 11, are members of the Little Ealing primary school team that won the national title this year. The team are due to compete at the February 2025 NFL Flag World Championships in Florida.

Leia, who played her first game when she was 10, said: "You get to run much more and there's a playbook which is quite fun and the quarterback gets to decide what play we do. You need to be able to jump high, get into space, watch the ball, run fast and dodge players."

Jacob added: "You need to make sure you listen well and really understand what you are doing."

After the school's success, the PE teacher Bobby Behzadi said he has been inundated with a "ridiculous" number of players keen to join.

Part of the popularity, he said, was the range of roles suiting people with different strengths. "Speed helps, but the thinkers can get into it too. It's a game of cat and mouse. There's a lot of decision-making."

Lucid dreaming Working out how to harness the sleeping brain's potential

Linda Geddes

Imagine a world in which you could solve problems, create art or music or even improve your tennis serve in your sleep. If scientists working in the field of lucid dreams succeed, that world could become a reality sooner than we realise.

Researchers are developing techniques that could enable more people to experience lucid dreams - a state of consciousness where a person is aware they are dreaming and can recognise their thoughts and emotions while doing so - and transfer the content of these dreams into their waking lives.

They have shown in recent months that it is possible to transfer the rhythm of dream music, switch on a real-life kettle and control a virtual car on a computer screen from inside a lucid dream.

"Sooner or later there will be methods or tools that will allow anybody to experience lucid dreams easily or relatively easily, we are searching for ways to connect these two worlds together," said Michael Raduga, the founder and chief executive of REMspace, a sleep research company in Redwood City, California, who led the studies. "Even for people who don't think they are smart, their subconscious is enormous, and we hope to be able to transfer all of this information into reality."

Although not everyone can do it, roughly half the population have experienced at least one lucid dream in their lifetimes and about a fifth experience them once a month or more.

An international group of researchers published a paper in Current Biology several years ago that suggested it was possible to ask people questions, either vocally or using morse code delivered via flashing lights, while they were in a lucid dream - including basic mathematical calculations - and for the dreamers to answer using eye movements or by contracting facial muscles to convey yes/no or numerical answers.

Raduga and his colleagues have since been expanding these techniques to broaden communication between dreamers and the waking world. They showed last year that it was possible to communicate musical rhythms from lucid dreams by teaching people to contract their arm muscles in time with a piece of music while they were awake, and then applying the same technique to relay the same musical rhythm while they were in a lucid dream.

Even though muscles are largely paralysed during REM sleep, when most dreaming occurs, they still produce micro-contractions that can be detected via electrical sensors on the skin. The next step will be to use this method to relay unique musical compositions from lucid dreams.

Raduga said the study was inspired by a dream he had experienced as a teenager in which he watched the German rock band Rammstein performing a piece of music. "It was the best song ever," he said. "I am not a musician, but something in my brain, and probably other people's brains, is capable of creating music better than people create in reality."

In another recent study, he and his colleagues converted electrical impulses from a dreamer's hand and facial muscles into commands to a smart speaker that enabled a lightbulb, electric kettle and radio to be switched on from inside their dream, demonstrating the possibility of performing morning tasks while still asleep.

In a further study, activity in dreamers' biceps and forearm and thigh muscles was connected to a virtual car, which they learned to drive by contracting their muscles while they were awake. Next, once brain recordings had confirmed they were in REM sleep, light flashes were used to signal to dreamers that they needed to make turns to avoid obstacles, and they were able to respond using the same muscle contractions. This technique could eventually be used to convey spatial information about the dream world.



▲ *Scientists have shown it is possible to perform real-life tasks, such as switching on a kettle, while asleep*
PHOTOGRAPH: HENRIK SORENSEN/GETTY IMAGES

"I am showing that it is possible to link these two realms," Raduga said. "These are small steps, but in 10 or 20 years, people could accomplish stuff related to their work or personal lives before waking up."

Other researchers questioned the utility of moving a virtual car or turning on a kettle while asleep, but said the ability to communicate dream content using several different muscle groups, with contractions held for different durations, might broaden the complexity of information that could be transferred from dreams.

"Once we can communicate in both directions, then dream research could move forwards, because you could ask people follow-up questions; maybe present them with more difficult cognitive tasks to better understand how the waking brain differs from the sleeping brain," said Dr Kristoffer Appel at the University of Osnabrück in Germany, who co-authored the Current Biology paper.

Emma Peters, a PhD student at the University of Bern in Switzerland who is investigating ways of increasing the frequency of lucid dreams, believes they could one day be used to aid physical recovery in stroke patients or to improve athletic performance. There is already evidence from her lab and others that rehearsing physical movements such as throwing darts or tossing a coin during lucid dreaming can improve real-life performance.

However, lucid dreaming is difficult to induce, even for experienced practitioners, limiting its application. "At this point, we are still trying to find ways to make [more] people lucid," said Peters. "The next step will be finding ways to practise better dream control."

There may already be ways to start harvesting the creative potential of the sleeping brain. Laura Roklicer at Swansea University is investigating whether teaching creative writers to lucid dream could improve their writing.

She has already gathered evidence that such individuals may be more prone to lucid dreaming. Previous studies have suggested that about 45% of the population can be trained to lucid dream, but so far 83% of the 29 writers Roklicer has been working with experienced at least once such dream after eight weeks of training.

Roklicer encourages writers to set themselves a work-related task as they are falling asleep, such as "find a new story idea" or "meet one of my characters in a dream".

In one recent unpublished study, she asked independent judges to score short stories produced by the writers before dream training and after it. On a range of measures, from emotional content, to symbolism, setting, character and plot, "all of that seemed to improve after the training", she said.

Roklicer believes other groups may benefit: "A lot of studies have looked at how different aspects of dreaming can help creativity through generating more original ideas or problem solving, and that can be applied across the board, from the arts, to science, to business.

"I think the biggest benefit is the authenticity. In today's world of AI-generated ideas, where most of the stories are the same kind of stories and so on, by looking into your dreams - and especially becoming lucid in your dreams - you can find more authentic ideas."

Do it yourself
How to get started

Keep a dream journal
Each morning, as soon as you wake up, write down everything you remember about your dreams, or use a voice-recording device to do the same. This can help familiarise yourself with your dreams, enabling you to become more aware of them once you are asleep.

Test reality
This exercise, performed while awake, trains the brain to better distinguish between dreams and reality, which may enhance lucidity once asleep. At regular intervals during the day, take careful stock of your surroundings, looking for anything out of the ordinary which might indicate you are dreaming.

Set intentions
Some people can increase the frequency of lucid dreams simply by telling themselves that they will become aware during their dreams, for example by repeating a phrase such as "once I'm asleep, I'll remember I'm dreaming".



▲ *Waking early then falling back to sleep can boost the odds of dreaming*

Wake up, then go back to sleep
Most dreams occur during REM sleep, which is more prevalent during the second half of the night. By setting an alarm clock to wake yourself an hour or so before your usual time, then drifting back to sleep, you may boost your chances of dropping straight into a dream. Telling yourself you'll become lucid in that dream may also help to achieve this.

External stimulation
Many recent studies designed to communicate with people during lucid dreams have used gentle vibration, electrical stimulation or flashing lights during REM sleep as a cue for the person to become aware in their dream and signal back to show they are. Some of these methods are also being investigated as a tool for increasing the frequency of lucid dreams.
Linda Geddes

Alarm over big rise in deaths of asylum seekers

Diane Taylor



The Bibby Stockholm, Dorset, where an asylum seeker is thought to have killed himself last year
PHOTOGRAPH: FINNBARR WEBSTER/GETTY IMAGES

The number of asylum seekers who have died in the care of the Home Office has more than doubled in the last year, according to data shared with the Guardian, a development that has been described as "deeply troubling".

While some deaths were a result of illness or old age, others are thought to have happened as a result of suicide, with charities fearing that treatment of asylum seekers in Britain has adversely affected the health of an already vulnerable group of people.

Many have fled persecution in their home countries where some experienced rape and torture or abuse by traffickers on their journey in search of safety.

The data relates to January-June 2024, when 28 people died, including two babies – one from Pakistan and another from Afghanistan – and a 15-year-old boy from Iraq. Figures obtained by the NGO the Civil Fleet show that for the same period in 2023, there were 13 deaths.

Enver Solomon, the chief executive of the Refugee Council, said: "The fact that there has been a sharp rise in the deaths of people in asylum accommodation is deeply troubling."

The Home Office does not publish information about deaths of asylum seekers in their care, and it can be difficult to obtain this information through freedom of information requests. The data for the first six months of 2024 does not provide detail of deaths beyond saying that the cause of some is unconfirmed. The 2023 data provides more detail showing some lives were cut short as a result of brutal circumstances – one person died as a result of a hit-and-run incident and another was forced to jump from a window of his room, which caught fire after the lithium battery on his e-bike exploded.

> **'These are people who have fled war, violence and terror'**
> **Enver Solomon**
> *Refugee Council*

According to longer-term data, there has been an increase in deaths in Home Office accommodation since 2020 with a doubling in suicides.

Between April 2016 and June 2024 there were 217 deaths with just 28 of those between April 2016 and December 2019, while between January 2020 and June 2024 there were 189 deaths – 87% of the total number during the whole period.

The increase in deaths coincides with a change by the Home Office from accommodating almost all asylum seekers in shared housing to moving tens of thousands into long-term hotel accommodation at the start of the pandemic.

Several were told they must accept "no choice" accommodation on the former Wethersfield military base in Essex or the controversial Bibby Stockholm barge in Portland, Dorset, where the Albanian asylum seeker Leonard Farruku is believed to have taken his life in December 2023.

Solomon added: "We see the hugely negative impact of men, women and children being left isolated in poor quality accommodation for months on end with minimal financial support. Let's not forget these are people who have fled war, violence and terror in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria and Sudan and come to the UK to be safe. It is the legal responsibility of government to ensure they are kept safe and well so that tragic deaths are avoided."

The British Red Cross, Britain's largest refugee services provider, has warned that people seeking asylum in England are falling through the cracks in the healthcare system and have launched a new framework to help GPs, health workers, charities and local authorities work together to ensure everyone who arrives to seek asylum is getting the healthcare they need and are entitled to.

The Home Office declined to comment on the increasing death toll among asylum seekers, but sources said the death data relates to the previous government and that the department always cooperates fully with investigations into the deaths of asylum seekers.

Samaritans can be contacted on freephone 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie.

Theatre review

Moving dementia story plays out like a thriller

Love Beyond
Assembly George Square, Edinburgh
★★★★☆

Arifa Akbar

This is the story of an elderly deaf man who arrives at a hospice with dementia to see out his last days. Nothing much happens, outwardly. Ramesh Meyyappan's astonishing play builds its power on the drama of this man's inner confusions, with memories crashing in on reality and hallucinations intruding into his everyday space.

It plays out like a thriller, with Harry (Meyyappan) its existential detective, trying to piece together his life story, from the death of his wife (Amy Kennedy) to her recurring reappearances, which appear like unsettling, yet alluring, fragments of a puzzle.

Meyyappan, a Glasgow-based Singaporean deaf writer and actor conveys just how alarming it is to have dementia, all the more so when you are deaf and your only nurse (Elicia Daly) cannot use BSL. He brings a beautifully subtle strain of physical theatre to his performance so you see every fleck of his fear and frustration.

Staged as part of the Made in Scotland showcase, it is stupendously directed by Matthew Lenton, and enacts the beguiling fantasies that suck Harry into his lost past and the thundering shock when they melt away.

This is partly done with a mirror across the stage (set design by Becky Minto), which plays out the distorted or unreliable visions that dementia can bring, implicating us, the audience, too by reflecting our images back to ourselves.

It becomes a metaphor for how Harry is at a remove from himself, as if seeing his life through a pane of glass, but a parallel world emerges on the other side too. The visual hallucinations of Harry's wife are both romantic and creepy, and there are sinister visual effects around the appearance of the younger Harry (Rinkoo Barpaga), as the older man stands stricken and angered by this unrecognisable version of himself.

Harry's room is sparsely furnished with a table, armchair and a tower of pebbles which set off happy memories and he clutches them as if they are solid, graspable pieces of the past. A piano score along with an electric, eerie soundscape (music composed by David Paul Jones) convey the emotions of his illness.

There are no captions with the signing, a clever way of placing a hearing audience in Harry's shoes: we guess what is being said, or look on with confusion. A play about love, death and communication, it is not an easy watch but an incredibly moving one.

Until 25 August

▼ *Ramesh Meyyappan as Harry is an existential detective in his own life story, with Amy Kennedy as Elise*
PHOTOGRAPH: MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN

Khan applies to run for Oxford chancellor role

Richard Adams
Education editor

Imran Khan, the imprisoned former prime minister of Pakistan, hopes to be Oxford University's next chancellor when graduates and staff vote this year.

Syed Zulfi Bukhari, one of Khan's advisers, said he had submitted an application to run in the election in October to replace Chris Patten.

Khan, 71, once an international cricket star, was Pakistan's prime minister from 2018 to 2022. He was ousted through an army-backed vote of no confidence in Pakistan's parliament and for the past 12 months has been in jail on a string of charges.

Elections to the largely ceremonial role used to require graduates and staff to be in Oxford to vote. But new rules allow nominations and voting to be done online.

Khan's qualifications include seven years as chancellor of the University of Bradford, and studying politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford's Keble College in the 1970s.

Fertility treatment loophole means exports of donor sperm sidestep UK's strict 10-family limit

Hannah Devlin
Science correspondent

Sperm donated in Britain is being exported and can be used to create large numbers of children across countries, contradicting a strict 10-family limit that applies in the UK, experts have warned.

A legal loophole means that, while a single donor can be used to create no more than 10 families in British fertility clinics, there are no restrictions on companies making sperm or eggs available for additional fertility treatments abroad.

With the lifting of donor anonymity and the ability to track down genetic relatives on DNA testing sites, this raises the prospect of some donor-conceived children navigating relationships with dozens of biological half-siblings across Europe.

Prof Jackson Kirkman-Brown, chair of the Association of Reproductive and Clinical Scientists (ARCS), is among those calling on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) to tighten restrictions.

"If you believe that it's necessary to enforce the 10-family limit in the modern world then logically that should apply wherever the sperm are from," said Kirkman-Brown, who is also director of the Centre for Human Reproductive Science at the University of Birmingham.

"There is data showing that some of the children who find the really big families struggle with that."

Until five years ago, the UK was primarily an importer of sperm, largely from Denmark and the US. But, as a growing number of international sperm and egg banks have opened donor centres in Britain, the picture is becoming more complex.

From 2019-21, 7,542 straws of sperm were exported from the UK, according to data provided by the HFEA (one IVF cycle typically requires one straw of sperm). The European Sperm Bank, which accounted for 90% of exports, applies a worldwide limit of 75 families a donor and estimates that its donors help on average 25 families.

Cryos, the world's largest sperm and egg bank, which opened a sperm donation unit in Manchester in April, said it "aims for 25 to 50 families per donor" worldwide.

Prof Lucy Frith, of Manchester University, who is researching donor-conceived experiences, said making contact with biological half-siblings was often viewed positively. "But when numbers of siblings began to grow [it] felt unmanageable to have contact and relationships with a growing and indeterminate number of people," she said.

"There are no hard and fast figures of when the number becomes 'too



'You feel mass-produced' Fear that pool of half-siblings could be in the hundreds

Hannah Devlin

Donor-conceived children can face the prospect of discovering multiple half-siblings which, in some cases, have been found in large numbers. The Guardian talked to the people affected.

Emma Dine
South Wales

Dine, 36, learned she was donor-conceived at the age of 10. She had wanted to reconnect with the man she believed to be her biological father, who had left the family home when she was three years old. But her mother revealed that her biological father was, in fact, an anonymous sperm donor.

▲ *Grace Halden had twins by a UK sperm donor in 2019 but was concerned to find his sperm could be exported*
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME ROBERTSON/ THE GUARDIAN

"It was one of my life's missions to find my biological father." Dine tracked him down through DNA testing websites. In the process, she also matched with 25 half-siblings.

"I do little maths scenarios in my head," said Dine. "About 5% of the UK population is on Ancestry.com. If we've identified 25 siblings on there alone – there's going to be variables, but if you just directly extrapolate it, you're looking at 500. Even if you take that down by a degree of magnitude, it makes me uncomfortable."

She initially worried the donor would be put off wanting to establish a relationship when he became aware of how many biological children were out there. But he and his wife were open and welcoming and Dine said she had an uncanny amount in common with the donor; they owned the same breed of dog, for example, and were both runners.

However, the steady accumulation of genetic half-siblings felt at times overwhelming. "I matched with my first half-brother, Sam, back in 2017. In seven years I've gone from one to 25."

She worried about the possibility of inadvertently forming a romantic connection with a blood relative and as a result said she had leaned towards dating men who were not from Britain. And discovering she was one of a large number of half-siblings had affected her sense of identity.

"You hear about people's parents meeting at Glastonbury. This isn't very glamorous or romantic and the numbers add to that



▲ *Liam Renouf-Macnab is from a sibling pod of 17 and would like to see tighter regulations of sperm banks*
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME ROBERTSON/ THE GUARDIAN

much' and this depends on individuals, but generally over 10 was felt to be a large group."

The potentially open-ended number of future siblings is another challenge. Kirkman-Brown said: "Once you've frozen sperm it doesn't get any older."

In theory, a donor could be used over years or even decades. "You can end up with donor siblings older than your parents, which is not somewhere we've been yet," he added.

Others noted that the increasing commercialisation of the market contrasts with the altruistic basis for donation of sperm and eggs, with British law only allowing compensation for time and expenses.

Prof Nicky Hudson, a medical sociologist at De Montford University, said: "It's presented to donors as a beautiful gift to help someone create a family, not as, 'We're going to maximise the number of births from your gametes and make as much money as we can from that.' When you speak to donors and present these possibilities to them, they're really surprised."

Hudson is researching egg donation, which is emerging as a new market thanks to advances in egg freezing techniques and could expand further when compensation increases from £750 to £986 in October.

The shipping of eggs could open new frontiers for biological motherhood. Hudson said: "The idea of a dad to loads of children already exists in our cultural imagination. We don't have that for women."

She added: "Egg donors really strongly rejected the idea of their eggs being shipped abroad. One told me it's akin to human trafficking."

The rationale for enforcing the 10-family limit across licensed clinics, according to the HFEA, is that consultation with donors and donor-conceived people suggests this is the figure people feel comfortable with in terms of the numbers of potential donor-conceived children, half-siblings and families that might be created.

Rachel Cutting, director of compliance and information at the HFEA, said: "As the HFEA has no remit over donation outside of HFEA-licensed clinics, there would be no monitoring of how many times a donor is used in these circumstances."

Others suggested that this remit could be expanded, in a comparable way to the HFEA's mandate that overseas donors cannot be anonymous.

Frith said: "The HFEA is limited by its statutory duties, but it could stipulate that it will only import gametes that meet the UK limit of 10 families outside the UK. So a donor who has donated in another country would have those offspring taken into account."

Sarah Norcross, director of the fertility charity Progress Educational Trust, said: "The HFEA's position that this is outside its remit is not good enough.

"I'm not against there being more than 10 families if some are outside the UK, but 75, which some of these banks have alighted on, is a heck of a lot of relatives. Even if they say we can't control the number of families abroad, they could insist that the number is made available to the recipient."

Both the European Sperm Bank and Cryos said they expect to supply most of the UK sperm to the UK market, based on customer demand.

The European Sperm Bank added: "We follow this topic very closely and engage in dialogue with both donor-conceived individuals, families and expert groups to get more insights and a deeper understanding of their wishes and concerns."

By numbers
Spreading seed

25 to 50
Families per donor supplied by Cryos, the world's biggest sperm bank, which now has a UK branch

75
The European Sperm Bank's limit on number of families per donor; it estimates the average is 25

7,542
Number of straws of sperm (a straw is enough for one IVF cycle) exported from Britain from 2019 to 2021



feeling. It does make you feel a bit mass-produced."

Grace Halden
London

Halden is a solo mother by choice and used donor sperm to conceive twin daughters, who were born in 2019. Halden, who is a senior lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London, has a professional background in bioethics but said she had been unaware of the possibility of her donor's sperm being exported.

"I selected a UK donor that I believed would be used for a maximum of 10 families. Everybody makes different decisions, but for me I wanted to keep the donor sibling pool as small as I could within my control."

When she revisited her donor's profile page some time after her daughters' birth, however, she was alarmed to see a note stating "export only". "I was blindsided. I felt as if I perhaps wouldn't have made the decision I'd made if I'd thought exportation was an option."

When she contacted the clinic, she was referred to the terms and conditions of the consent forms she had signed. "Sure enough, it was buried in there," she said. After raising the issue on a local social media group, she realised others were making similar discoveries.

Halden has since been reassured that in her case, the donor's sperm will not be exported and said the sperm bank had responded positively after she raised the issue. However, she is concerned there is a wider lack of transparency.

"Yes, it's a business, but they're in the business of creating people. The priority must always be the children who are created."



▲ *Emma Dine, who found the steady accumulation of genetic half-siblings at times overwhelming* PHOTOGRAPH: DIMITRIS LEGAKIS/ATHENA PICTURES

Kevin Moore
Wiltshire

Moore, 39, is donor-conceived and also a sperm donor. Now based in Wiltshire, Moore is originally from Florida, where, "in the 80s, when I was born, they didn't keep on top of records".

He is on a WhatsApp group with seven of his donor half-siblings, but has no idea of the total number. "There are a lot of stories coming out of the States with these huge family gatherings."

With each addition it is harder to form a meaningful connection, he has found. "It's just hard to establish a relationship with someone every year, every two years," he said. "You have to go through the same life story ... I'm like, 'Not again.'"

Moore is also a sperm donor and has at least 14 biological children, based on the figure provided five years ago by the HFEA, the UK fertility regulator. "I was like, 'Oh my goodness, that's quite a lot.' That's where I think the 10 family limit feels a bit heavier. Even now, because there's no limit within families, I could have 20 plus. That's kind of intense."

So far, the mother of one of his biological children - a 12-year-old girl - has been in touch. "As a first experience it was very respectful and nice," he said, but it came at a time when he needed to support his own parents in the US who were having health problems. "You don't know if and when they're going to find you but you have to be prepared to have that conversation 20 times."

Moore is in favour of "some sort of limit" and believes 10 families feels about right. "For me, it raises the question of why one donor has to be used 50 times. Is there not a better solution than this? You imagine these extended families of thousands and thousands of people. It's less a personal issue for me, but more an issue for society."

'If we've identified 25 siblings on Ancestry.com alone and you just directly extrapolate it, you're looking at 500'

Emma Dine
South Wales

Liam Renouf-Macnab
London

Renouf-Macnab, 29, connected with four biological half-siblings after taking part in the ITV documentary Born From the Same Stranger and has since been in touch with another three half-siblings. "Seven feels manageable," he said. "I'm building relationships with them and that's been really amazing."

From non-identifying information provided by the HFEA, he knows he is from a sibling pod of 17 and although this is feasibly within the 10-family limit, he said he felt shocked by the number.

"I feel proud to be part of a heritage that's really connected to women's rights, fertility rights, LGBT rights," he said. "But the marketisation of the industry to create 17 children felt like something I had to deal with and process and think through."

Renouf-Macnab would like to see tighter regulation of the industry, with sperm banks brought into public ownership and a legal obligation on the HFEA to inform donor-conceived people of their biological origins. "One thing I support is that donor-conceived people have the right to know. If the HFEA, at 18, contacted the people who are donor conceived to tell them, it would spur parents on to make sure they have those conversations early."

World

'Resurrected': Democrats prepare for joy and unity at convention in Chicago

Lauren Gambino

Tens of thousands of Democrats are expected to descend on Chicago this week for their party's convention, bubbling with a feeling few had anticipated: pure, unconfined joy.

At the end of their four-day fete, when the red, white and blue balloons tumble from the rafters of the United Center, Kamala Harris will have become the first woman of colour to accept a major party's presidential nomination in US history.

The moment will cap a frenzied few weeks for Democrats, after the vice-president's sudden ascent to the top of the ticket in a development that has transformed the race for the White House and galvanised a party once resigned to a rematch between Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

"It's a remarkable turn of events," said Howard Dean, a former Democratic National Committee chairman and former Vermont governor. "The Democrats have now been resurrected."

In less than a month since Biden's decision to abandon his re-election campaign, Harris has united most Democrats and restored the party's dominance among young voters and people of colour.

While the race remains nail-bitingly close, two new polls over the weekend found Harris leading Trump nationally, by four and five points: 49-45 in a Washington Post-ABC News-Ipsos survey and 50-45 in a poll from the New York Times and Siena College. An average of all recent polling shows Harris leading Trump by two points, 49-47.

Harris also now leads among registered voters in two Sun Belt states, Arizona and North Carolina - the only two of the so-called swing states that Trump won in 2020 - and is closing the gap with Trump in two others, Nevada and Georgia.

Harris's crowds have been large and electric - a development that appears to irk her rival, still struggling to find a mocking nickname. Fundraising has poured in at a record pace. Celebrities, artists and fashion designers are eager to help. Online, young people continue to churn out memes and flattering content.

Party officials say the Harris-inspired vibe shift is trickling down ballot and translating into on-the-ground organising.

"You can see the giant crowd packing the rallies," said Ben Wikler, chair of the Wisconsin Democratic party. "But what you can't see in those images is the fact that thousands of the people who go to those rallies are signing up for volunteer shifts and then going out and knocking on the doors of potential swing voters."

Harris officially secured the nomination in a virtual roll-call vote this month instead of at the convention. Then she chose Tim Walz, the Minnesota governor, as her running mate, drawing plaudits from both poles of the party - an occurrence so rare the progressive congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez quipped that Democrats were showing "disconcerting levels of array".

That harmony will be tested inside and outside of the convention hall, where pro-Palestinian protesters and "uncommitted" anti-war delegates plan to make their voices heard.

Still, Democrats hope to project a message of unity, as Harris and Walz, self-described "joyful warriors", ride a wave of momentum into Chicago. Enthusiasm among Democrats surged from 46% in February, when the 81-year-old president was cruising essentially unchallenged toward his party's nomination, to 85% in August, according to a survey by Monmouth University. Even among independents, enthusiasm has spread, from 34% to 53% over the same period.

"What you're seeing is gen X rising," said Jane Kleeb, the chair of the Nebraska Democratic party. Harris is technically a boomer, missing the gen-X cut-off by a couple of months, but supporters say she embodies the cultural ethos of the generation.

"We always incorporate kind of pop culture and fun, because that's who we are," Kleeb said. "And now we are going to implement policies that we've been screaming from the sidelines on."

At the United Center, Democrats will hear speeches from party luminaries, leaders and rising stars. Biden will deliver a pass-the-torch style speech today, making the case that Harris is the best person to finish a campaign he started. By tradition, Walz will accept the vice-presidential nomination on Wednesday night, and Harris will deliver her presidential acceptance speech on Thursday.

Minyon Moore, the chair of the convention, said: "The story here is simple and it's one that will resonate with Americans across the country: Kamala Harris and Tim Walz are fighting for the American people and America's future - Donald Trump is only fighting for himself."

The Republican convention in Milwaukee featured a performance by Kid Rock, but it is not yet known who will provide entertainment in Chicago. MoveOn, a liberal organising group, has started an online petition asking Taylor Swift and Beyoncé to perform together.

To spread their message online, and reach Americans glued to their phones, Democrats are rolling out a "blue carpet" for nearly 200 social media influencers who have been given credentials to cover the event like members of the traditional press.

Deja Foxx, a 24-year-old content creator and reproductive rights activist in Tucson, Arizona, who worked on Harris's 2020 campaign, said: "Young people hold a lot of power at the ballot box, we know that. But they also hold an outsized influence on the narrative because of social media and platforms like TikTok, where they hold the lion's share of narrative power."

Harris has captured the country's attention. But voters need to know more about her and her ambitions, said Michael Steele, a former chair of the Republican National Committee turned anti-Trump political analyst.

"From the first night through the last night and every speech in between you have to make clear the value of having this person as president," Steele said. "When you walk away from this convention, you need to feel good about what you just saw."

Amid the star-spangled pomp and pageantry in Chicago, allies, colleagues and family will testify to Harris's strength and her story. But her historic acceptance speech on Thursday night will provide the best opportunity for her to lay out the choice before voters this November.

As a candidate, Harris has emphasised her work as a "courtroom prosecutor" - once seen as a liability - to draw a sharp contrast with Trump, who, she reminds voters, is a convicted felon. On the campaign trail, she boasts about her record targeting "predators", "cheaters" and "fraudsters", concluding with the applause line: "Hear me when I say, I know Donald Trump's type."

For many Democrats, Harris's sharp attacks on Trump, the jokes, even the insults - all as she and Walz preach positivity - are a welcome change in tone. After the unease of watching Biden flail during a June debate, they are now waiting for Harris to confront Trump on stage.

However the convention unfolds over a four-day arc in Chicago, it will not be the one Democrats initially expected to hold.

They had been accused of resignation, even defeatism, in the days after an assassination attempt on Trump's life, captured by the image of him being pulled from the stage with blood on his face and a fist raised in defiance. The former president arrived at his party's convention in Milwaukee



Preparations being made for the Democratic national convention (DNC) at Chicago's United Center
PHOTOGRAPH: ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



> *'What you're seeing is gen X rising. We always incorporate pop culture and fun'*
>
> **Jane Kleeb** *Nebraska Democratic party*

Sicilian drought
Tourists undeterred by water crisis
Page 25



Kursk incursion
'Over 150 Russian PoWs captured on some days'
Page 26



On her way: Kamala Harris is greeted with enthusiasm at a rally in Raleigh, North Carolina on Friday in the run-up to the convention
PHOTOGRAPH: JONATHAN DRAKE/ REUTERS

with a bandaged ear, elevated by his followers to living martyr. He confidently chose JD Vance, the Ohio senator and flag-bearer of an angry hard-right movement.

Then 81-year-old Biden did the remarkable: he stepped aside and endorsed his vice-president.

"I think we're still all trying to find words for it because what's happened is so extraordinary," said Simon Rosenberg, a Democratic strategist who has spent the last several years defying conventional political wisdom with a relentless belief in his party's electoral strength.

In Rosenberg's view, the contest was reshaped by three key moments. The first was Trump's choice of Vance as a running mate – polls have found that he is one of the most unpopular vice-presidential selections in recent history. The next was Biden bowing out and effectively anoint Harris as his successor.

Third was Harris's ability to come "roaring out of the gate ready to go", thrilling a party that had never fully accepted her as the heir apparent. In their first appearance together as the Democratic ticket, Walz thanked Harris for "bringing back the joy".

Rosenberg argues that Harris's optimistic, forward-looking vision is key to defeating a man Democrats view as a grievous threat to democracy.



A painting of Harris outside the convention centre draws attention

"This is the central project of the west right now," Rosenberg said, "to prevent the far-right parties from gaining power. Europe and the UK were just very successful in that and we're going to be very successful in that in November."

Excitement among the party faithful will converge in Chicago with the frustration many left-leaning activists feel over the president's handling of Israel's war on Gaza, which has now killed more than 40,000 Palestinians.

As fragile ceasefire negotiations take place in Doha, large gatherings of anti-war protesters are expected just outside the official perimeter of the convention, in an effort to persuade the administration to shut off military aid to Israel and help end the war.

Inside the convention hall, the 30 uncommitted delegates, who mostly represent the Democratic primary voters opposed to Biden's handling of the war, will have the access and ability to address attenders directly.

Some Democrats fear that clashes between police and protesters, in an echo of the party's 1968 convention in Chicago, will distract from the event and broadcast a disunity that could hurt them in November. Republicans will capitalise on any signs of division as Trump searches for ways to wrest the spotlight from his new rival.

Yet the response to Harris's ascent over the past four weeks is a sign that she has tapped into a deep desire to move away from the doom and gloom that has gripped US politics for nearly a decade, said Jennifer Mercieca, a professor of communication at Texas A&M University and the author of Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump.

"All of the doomscrolling, the fear-mongering, all of the stress and the trauma that we have been through over the last eight years has really worn us out," she said.

"We don't want to be afraid all the time. The same way that doom is contagious, hope is contagious."

Additional reporting **Joan E Greve**

'I don't ramble' Trump loses focus at rally in state crucial to his reset

Chris McGreal
Wilkes-Barre

Donald Trump tried to reset his campaign at a rally in battleground Pennsylvania on Saturday, with polls showing Kamala Harris pulling ahead in swing states.

But the former president quickly broke away from the prepared speech about economic issues to launch personal attacks on Harris, including accusations that her agenda was both communist and fascist, and that she had "the laugh of a crazy person".

Trump addressed a mostly filled 8,000-seat indoor arena in Wilkes-Barre, although a part of the audience left before he finished speaking.

Some Republican strategists had hoped the former president could regain the initiative by zeroing in on issues on which opinion polls say voters have greater trust in Trump than the Democrats, such as inflation.

Trump attacked Harris as part of the Biden administration for the surge in prices that has hit many Americans hard, and described increased household costs as "the Kamala Harris inflation tax". "She was there for everything," he said, attempting to pin Biden's policies on her.

Trump also disparaged Harris's pledge on Friday to tackle high grocery costs by targeting profiteering by food corporations, and to bring down housing and prescription drug costs.

Likening her approach to the Soviet Union's economic system, he said: "In her speech yesterday, Kamala went full communist … Comrade Kamala announced that she wants to institute socialist price controls. You saw that never worked before … It will cause rationing, hunger and skyrocketing prices."

The former president challenged voters to ask themselves whether they were "better off with Kamala and Biden than you were under President Donald J Trump", a question that many in Pennsylvania might answer in his favour.

But the impact was soon lost as Trump once again veered repeatedly away from the script with rambling discourses from immigration to China and trans people, often based on outright falsehoods.

At one point, he even acknowledged that was what he was doing.

"They'll say he was rambling," he said. "I don't ramble. I'm a really smart guy, you know, really smart. I don't ramble. But the other day, anytime I hit too hard, they say he was rambling, rambling."

Trump also challenged Harris's legitimacy as the Democratic presidential candidate, describing it as "a coup" against Biden. "Joe Biden hates her. This was an overthrow of a president," he said.

He described Harris's decision to pass over Pennsylvania's governor, Josh Shapiro, as her running mate, as antisemitism, in an apparent reference to debate about whether Shapiro's support for Israel, including work for the Israeli embassy in the past, would damage the Democratic campaign because of the war in Gaza .

"They turned him down because he's Jewish. That's why they turned him down. Now, we can be politically correct and not say that. I could say, well, they turned him down for various reasons. No, no, they turned him down because he's Jewish," said Trump.

"And I'll tell you this: any Jewish person that votes for her or a Democrat has to go out and have their head examined."

Through it all, Trump repeatedly returned to personal attacks on Harris, including a bizarre discourse on how she laughs, a mannerism that has proved popular among many younger voters. "Have you heard her laugh? That is the laugh of a crazy person. That is the laugh of a crazy, the laugh of a lunatic," he said.

Meanwhile, on NBC's Meet the Press programme yesterday, the Republican senator and Donald Trump loyalist Lindsey Graham warned that Trump was in danger of losing the presidential election if he continued to talk about Harris's race and make other personal attacks instead of focusing on policy issues.



Supporters of Donald Trump at the former president's campaign rally in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, yesterday
PHOTOGRAPH: MICHAEL M SANTIAGO/ GETTY IMAGES

Eyewitness



Swifties assemble

The atmosphere outside Wembley before Taylor Swift's gigs was buzzing with an infectious energy from fans who had travelled from all corners of the UK and beyond. The stadium filled with friends dressed in glittering outfits, trading bracelets and singing their favourite songs. Swifties bonded over stories of past concerts and favourite albums, while others discussed what surprises the night might hold. They don't just listen to the music, they wear it. Every one of the singer's musical eras has inspired a distinct style, embraced by fans and creating a vibrant fashion culture that mirrors the evolution of their idol. Fans pour their creativity into crafting accessories that incorporate lyrics and imagery from Swift's discography. Everyone was united by their love for 'Tay Tay' and the anticipation of an unforgettable night.

Words and pictures by Dougie Wallace














WEMBLEY PARK STATION
I Bet You Think About Me










TAYLOR SWIFT
THE ERAS TOUR




ERAS TOUR
BUT DADDY I LOVE HIM

German AI-made parody song on immigrants reaches Top 50

Philip Oltermann
Deborah Cole *Berlin*

A song about immigrants with music, vocals and artwork entirely generated using artificial intelligence has made the Top 50 most listened to songs in Germany, in what may be a first for a leading music market.

Verknallt in einen Talahon is a parody song that weaves modern lyrics – many of them based around racial stereotypes about immigrants – with 1960s schlager pop.

The song is No 48 in Germany, the world's fourth largest music market. Less than a month after its release, the song has 3.5m streams on Spotify and is No 3 on the streaming platform's global viral chart.

Its creator, Josua Waghubinger, who uses the name Butterbro, said he made the song's chorus by feeding his own lyrics into Udio, an AI tool that can generate vocals and instrumentation from simple text prompts.

He used the music tool to add a verse after the chorus gained a favourable response on TikTok. "I think there's still enough creative freedom in the song to make it a creative project," the IT professional and hobby musician told Die Klangküche, a German music production podcast.

The song has drawn attention in German media not only for the AI used but also its lyrical content. Translating as In Love With a Talahon, the song references a Germanised version of the Arabic expression "taeal huna", meaning "come here" but now commonly used in Germany to describe groups of young men with immigrant backgrounds, often with derogatory overtones.

The lyrics parody the "good girl falls for bad boy" storylines of songs of the 60s. The object of the AI-generated singer's desire wears "a Louis belt, a Gucci bag and Air Max trainers" and "smells like an entire perfume shop". Her lover is "as sweet as baklava" – presumably an attempt to identify him with Turkish culture.

Waghubinger said he wanted to make a song that made fun of overtly macho behaviour "with a twinkle in the eye and without discriminating", but added that his overriding motivation had been to produce a track that would go viral on social media. "That was the challenge I set myself," he told Die Klangküche.

But Marie-Luise Goldmann, the culture editor of the conservative broadsheet Die Welt, said the song walked a fine line between parody and discrimination.

"The mixing of migrant youth culture with German schlager conservatism alone will thrill as many listeners as it offends," she said. "The talahon [in the song] doesn't hide his backward gender image but it's debatable whether [Butterbro] is trivialising, glorifying or attacking it."

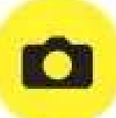
Felicia Aghaye, a writer for the music magazine Diffus, said the song's popularity was "doubly problematic" because "talahon" was firmly established as an insult among young Germans and Austrians against migrants.

"Rightwing groups, for example, use the term to create a bogeyman and stoke Islamophobia and xenophobia," she said. "What's problematic is that Butterbro doesn't seem to understand the negative issues around the term. His track is to a certain extent aiding and abetting making the term mainstream."

Numerous AI-generated songs in a similar style, mixing 60s schlager pop with crudely sexualised lyrics, are circulating on German social media.

AI is increasingly used by music producers to generate vocals in the style of well-known singers. In 2023 the Beatles released Now and Then, a track that used AI to help recreate John Lennon's vocals.

A track featuring an AI-generated version of Tupac Shakur's voice was uploaded on Canadian rapper Drake's Instagram account in April, but disappeared after lawyers for the late rapper reportedly threatened to sue.



Indonesia celebrates
People in traditional dress pose for photographs before taking part in celebrations in Banda Aceh to mark the 79th anniversary of Indonesia's independence from Japanese rule at the end of the second world war.



PHOTOGRAPH: CHAIDEER MAHYUDDIN/ AFP/GETTY

Town of Corleone is angered by 'vile' post by son of mafia boss

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

The son of a notorious mafia boss has sparked fury in the Sicilian town of Corleone after posting a message on social media that was condemned as a "vile attack" against the Italian state.

On Ferragosto, a beloved national holiday in Italy marked on 15 August, Giuseppe Salvatore "Salvuccio" Riina, one of the sons of Salvatore "Totò" Riina, wished his followers a "happy holiday" from "via Scorsone 24, Corleone, Italy".

The address was home to the Riina family for years but in 2018 the street's name was changed to Via Terranova in tribute to the anti-mafia judge Cesare Terranova, who was shot dead in 1979 in an ambush orchestrated by the Corleone mafia boss, Luciano Liggio.

The name was changed by interior ministry commissioners who at the time were administering Corleone – featured in The Godfather novel and film trilogy – after its town hall was dissolved owing to mafia infiltration.

Walter Rà, who was elected as the mayor of Corleone in June, described the post as "cowardly" while reaffirming that the town would not bow down to intimidation. "We won't allow it," he told Italian media.

Riina later edited the post to take out the reference to "via Scorsone".

Totò Riina died in prison in 2017. He is believed to have ordered more than 150 murders including the killings of the anti-mafia judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in 1992.

Salvuccio Riina returned to live in Corleone in 2023 after serving almost nine years in prison. Corleone's former administration had attempted to expel him in a move to protect the town from "reputational damage".

The town's current leaders said in a statement on Riina's social media post: "We firmly distance ourselves from such declarations and firmly condemn such bravado, which sounds like a vile attack against the state and institutions."

In brief

Mediterranean

Man rescued five hours after falling from ship

A sailor was rescued unharmed from the eastern Mediterranean early yesterday, nearly five hours after falling off a commercial ship.

Cypriot authorities said the 24-year-old Lebanese national needed no medical attention after the Nivin, the Panamanian-flagged vehicles carrier from which he had fallen 18 metres (60ft) into the water, plucked him from the sea.

A helicopter search failed to locate the sailor after combing a 10 sq mile area 115 miles south-east of Cyprus for close to an hour, however, the Nivin's crew heard him crying out for help and picked him up. AP *Nicosia*

Libya

Central bank suspends operations after kidnap

The Central Bank of Libya said it was suspending all operations yesterday after a bank official was abducted in the capital, Tripoli.

Musab Msallem, the head of IT, "was kidnapped by an unidentified group". The bank added that it would not resume operations until Msallem's release. Other officials had also been threatened with abduction, the bank said.

The kidnapping came a week after armed men laid siege to the central bank's Tripoli headquarters in what was reported to be an attempt to force the resignation of its governor, Seddik al-Kabir. Agence France-Presse *Tripoli*

Germany

More than 23 injured in Leipzig ferris wheel fire

At least 23 people were injured when a ferris wheel caught fire at a music festival near Leipzig in eastern Germany, the dpa news agency reported yesterday. The fire started in one gondola and spread to a second on Saturday night. Four people suffered burns and one suffered injuries from a fall.

The incident took place at the Highfield festival at Störmthaler Lake near Leipzig. Police are investigating the cause. As of yesterday morning, the exact number of casualties had not been determined. The operator said no passengers were in the gondola in which the fire started. AP *Berlin*





Sicily's water crisis

Tourists undeterred as drought pushes farmers to the brink



◀ Fields parched by drought and extreme heat in southern Sicily, where a growing water crisis has yet to deter tourists, who continue to flock to sites such as the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento, below
PHOTOGRAPHS: ROBERTO SALOMONE/ THE GUARDIAN



Lorenzo Tondo
Sutera

For the first time in four generations of his family's farming history, Vito Amantia's threshers have lain silent this year. The 650 tonnes of wheat his farm usually produces in a year has been lost - withered under the scorching sun and parched by relentless drought.

"A seasoned farmer doesn't need to check the forecast to understand what the weather will be like," says Amantia, 68, who farms on the Catania plain in eastern Sicily. "Already last January, I knew it would be a disastrous year. The wheat seedlings that normally reached 80cm stopped at 5cm. Then they dried up."

Sicily is grappling with one of the most serious water crises in its history. The island, the largest and most populous in the Mediterranean, where a European record high temperature of 48.8C was reached in 2021, is at risk of desertification. In the last six months of 2023 only 150mm (5.9in) of rain fell, and in May the government in Rome declared a state of emergency.

But while it poses an existential threat for many local people, the crisis isn't deterring tourists. As in many parts of southern Europe, Sicily finds itself caught between water scarcity and a soaring influx of visitors who, despite the additional pressure they place on resources, remain one of the main drivers of the economy.

"The average tourist seeks the sun regardless of the lack of water and demands that water be readily available," says Christian Mulder, a professor of ecology and climate emergency at the University of Catania. "Overtourism increases pressure on Sicily's already scarce water resources, with inevitable consequences for the environment."

A staggering 70% of Sicily is at risk of desertification, according to the Italian national research council. Most of the island's lakes are already almost dry. The artificial lake of Fanaco, in central Sicily, once had a capacity of 20m cubic metres of water but today holds just 300,000.

Faced with water rationing, businesses have been forced to shut down and thousands of families are storing supplies in their homes for washing or cooking. According to the national association of the agricultural water board, some reservoirs were operating at just 10% of capacity in March.



▲ Liborio Mangiapane on his farm in Cammarata, where he fears he will have to cull his 100 cows and 150 goats



▶ Residents of Agrigento in southern Sicily fill containers with water from the only working fountain left in the city

"This is an unprecedented drought emergency," said Sicily's governor, Renato Schifani.

Coupled with drought, summer wildfires have also destroyed vegetation. Last year, according to a regional civil protection agency estimate, fires caused more than €60m (£51m) in damages, with more than 693 hectares (1,712 acres) of woodland on the island lost. Between Monday and Tuesday last week at least 10 fires across the island had destroyed dozens of hectares of forests, pine groves and farmland.

Coldiretti, Italy's biggest farmers' association, is striving to support the agricultural sector by dipping into its own pockets to refill artificial lakes using tankers. But this effort alone is insufficient.

The scale of the challenge is evident on a journey through the Sicilian hinterland, where the only signs of life are small herds of skeletal cattle sprawled across the arid hills. Here, temperatures soar above 40C during daylight hours. There is no longer any water for livestock to drink.

According to the association of young agricultural entrepreneurs, drought is driving young farmers off the island, while dozens of farms have been forced to sell or slaughter their livestock.

Liborio Mangiapane, a 60-year-old farmer who raises 100 cows and 150 goats in the countryside around Cammarata, says that if the situation does not improve he will have to cull his herd.

"Without water, my cows no longer produce milk," Mangiapane says. "The land is slowly becoming desertified. Even in our own family, we are forced to shower and cook using bottled water because there is no running water left."

Despite the water crisis, Sicily's many hotels, resorts and B&Bs remain bustling, the streets of the main cities are teeming with tourists, restaurants are fully booked and beaches are packed with thousands of people. There are long queues to visit museums, churches and monuments.

"I knew about the water crisis. Some friends here in Sicily told me that the situation wasn't extreme, that's why I decided to come," says Loretta Sebastiani, 25, from Rome. "As for the heat, I'm used to the stifling heat of the capital."

"There have been no cancellations or major disruptions," says Nico Torrisi, the president of Sicily's hotel association, "but it is clear that some facilities are facing difficulties, especially in the province of Agrigento, where some B&B owners have encountered water supply issues.

"The problem is that in Sicily, the climate has been changing for years and we have to get used to the fact that every summer will bring extreme heat and drought."

Rather than putting people off, however, visitors continue to come. According to figures collected by the Data Appeal Company at the two main airports, Palermo and Catania, flight arrivals in August were up 20% and 16% respectively on last year.

Some hotels and B&Bs have prepared for a dry season by installing water tanks, while others have had to resort to private water trucks to fill their tanks.

"We wake up every morning to check the water levels in our tanks," says Francesco Picarella, the president of hotel association in Agrigento. "Tourists are not fleeing the Sicilian cities at all. However, some hotels and B&Bs are facing difficulties in managing water and ensuring daily water supply to their guests."

Traditionally, drinking water in the island is sourced from aquifers, subterranean rock layers saturated with water, while water for agriculture is stored in large tanks constructed after the second world war. Both rely on winter rainfall, which is increasingly scarce.

"While large hotels in the drought-affected areas, like the province of Agrigento, have a range of infrastructure in place to provide water to their guests, smaller businesses with fewer resources are suffering," Mulder says.

Giuseppe Friscia, who runs a B&B in Sciacca in Agrigento, has bought a warehouse where he has installed water tanks capable of holding up to 10,000 litres. "Some B&Bs are forced to call private water trucks and pay €90 (£77) each time to fill their tanks," he says.

A subterranean aquifer discovered in November represents an important potential resource. Geologists identified the underground basin at about 800 metres beneath the Iblei mountains in the province of Ragusa. It is thought to contain about 17bn cubic metres of water.

"If the analysis confirms its usability, this huge reservoir could represent an extraordinary resource for the medium and long term," said Schifani.

The basin is located just a few dozen miles from the lands of Catania farmer Vito Amantia, but he is not getting his hopes up. The farmer knows that the future of his work and that of the entire island is hanging by a thread.

"They'd better hurry," he says. "They'd better realise that this is a ticking timebomb."





▲ Maria, 88, who lives near the border in Ukraine's Sumy region

Over 150 Russians captured on some days of incursion, says Sumy official



▲ A vehicle hit by a Russian Lancet drone strike in the Sumy region

◀ Oleksii Drozdenko, the head of military administration in Sumy, the Ukrainian city closest to the incursion zone

PHOTOGRAPHS: JULIA KOCHETOVA/ THE GUARDIAN

Dan Sabbagh
Sumy

Ukraine has captured more than 150 Russian prisoners of war on some days in the cross-border military operation that a key civilian official said was the first of "several stages" in taking the fight to Moscow.

Oleksii Drozdenko, the head of the military administration in the Ukrainian city of Sumy, said the attack had fared better than expected and there had been only 15 casualties needing hospital treatment on the first day.

"Sometimes there are more than 100 or 150 prisoners of war a day," Drozdenko said. Many of the Russian troops guarding the border were young conscripts. "They do not want to fight us," he added.

Videos have circulated of Ukrainians capturing prisoners of war, including at the border in the first hours of the incursion on 6 August.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has said Kyiv is increasing its "exchange fund" to swap for PoWs held by Russia.

Last night Zelenskiy said Ukraine's military incursion aimed to create a buffer zone to prevent further attacks by Moscow across the border. It marked the first time the Ukrainian president had clearly stated the aim of the operation.

In his nightly address, Zelenskiy said: "It is now our primary task in defensive operations overall to destroy as much Russian war potential as possible and conduct maximum counteroffensive actions.

"This includes creating a buffer zone on the aggressor's territory – our operation in the Kursk region."

Sumy is the Ukrainian city closest to the incursion zone and Drozdenko said he had been closely involved in the operation's planning but had been sworn to secrecy, zipping his lips in a gesture to describe the importance of operational security before the surprise attack.

Other local civilian leaders, notably the Sumy region's governor, Volodymyr Artyukh, have said they were not warned in advance, suggesting Drozdenko was in a trusted circle.

The city official, a Zelenskiy appointee who is Sumy's de facto mayor after the previous incumbent was charged with allegedly receiving a bribe last autumn, said he could not say too much about preparations for the incursion a fortnight ago because there was more to come.

"We see only part of this operation. In the future we will see several stages," Drozdenko said, characterising the incursion as "not like previous raids" from Ukraine into Belgorod oblast to the east, which were largely led by anti-Kremlin Russian groups.

On the ground there are signs that Ukraine has introduced a new tactic to try to gain more Russian territory. Yesterday morning Ukraine's air force released a video of a hole being blown in a bridge at Zvannoe, over the Seym River inside Kursk province.

Days earlier another bridge over the Seym had been severed after a Ukrainian air attack, north of the village of Glushkovo, which is near the frontline of the incursion and subject to a civilian evacuation order by Russian authorities.

Though Ukraine has not spelled out its intentions, knocking out the three bridges over the Seym at Glushkovo, Zvannoe and Karyzh would complicate Russian reinforcement of a pocket of land to the west of the current incursion area and improve Ukraine's prospects of seizing the land if its progress continues.

At the end of last week, Sumy and neighbouring regions organised a humanitarian transport of food and medicine to Russian civilians in the occupied area, including from "our own food stores", Drozdenko said. No Russian civilians had fled across the border to become refugees in Ukraine, he added.

Part of Drozdenko's role was to ensure hospitals in Sumy were ready to receive casualties once the incursion started. "There is an unexpectedly low amount of wounded," the official said.

"On the first day of the operation, there were only 15 casualties; 60-70% of them were very light, caused by bomb damage, shrapnel," he added, reflecting the fact that the attack was a surprise to the Kremlin, which believed Ukraine would fight to defend its own territory.

Last week, civilians in Sumy were asked to donate O-negative blood, which is suitable for emergency transfusions for any blood type. The need was met "in one hour", the official said, which "confirms that our people support this operation".

Sumy city, a quiet provincial capital in north-east Ukraine with a population of about 250,000, had not been involved in fighting since the early days of the war when it was surrounded and defended by a civilian militia, of which Drozdenko was part.

The incursion has brought the war back to Sumy and the border areas to the north, with renewed air, missile and artillery strikes.

People in Sumy were resilient despite the latest bombing, Drozdenko said, because the city had fought off the initial Russian invasion in March 2022, at a time when the regular army was 60 miles away.

Highlighting his own experience, he said: "Back then I was not feeling that optimistic. We took part in street fighting. I was almost nearly killed twice. It was very scary being shot at by a BTR [Russian armoured personnel carrier]. Now I'm not scared of anything."



Source: the Institute for the Study of War with AEI's Critical Threats Project

Growth crisis?
Labour needs to face deeper issues
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Business

Property market buoyed by first rate cut in four years

Richard Partington
Economics correspondent

The first Bank of England rate cut in four years has triggered an "immediate" upturn in the UK property market, as cheaper mortgages prompt interest among buyers and drive up house prices.

Figures from the property website Rightmove show the number of potential buyers contacting estate agents about homes for sale had jumped by 19% since 1 August compared with the same time a year ago. In July the number was up 11% on the previous year.

The Bank cut interest rates on 1 August for the first time since the start of the Covid pandemic, easing pressure on households after it had raised borrowing costs to the highest level since the 2008 financial crisis to tackle soaring inflation.

It cut its key base rate from 5.25% to 5%, after a fall in inflation back to more normal levels this year. Figures last week showed inflation rose to 2.2% in July, above the Bank's 2% target. But it remains significantly lower than a peak of 11.1% two years ago after Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered a surge in energy prices.

Rightmove said the Bank cutting borrow costs had helped to accelerate the availability of cheaper mortgages from high street lenders, alongside contributing "significantly" to improved buyer demand.

Saying that future Bank rate cuts would establish a buoyant autumn property market, it upgraded its house price forecasts from a 1% drop over the whole of 2024 to a 1% rise in new seller asking prices.

Financial markets widely expect the Bank will react to fading inflationary pressures by cutting rates further, possibly to as low as 3.5% by the end of next year. The Bank is expected to keep rates on hold at its next meeting in September, before restarting reductions in borrowing costs in November.

Andrew Bailey, the Bank's governor, is expected to speak at the annual US gathering of central bank policymakers at the Rocky Mountains resort of Jackson Hole on Friday.

Rightmove said the average new seller asking price had fallen this month by 1.5%, or by £5,708, to £367,785. Prices typically fall in August from July during the quieter months for the property market. The fall was in line with the long-term average for the last 18 years.

"As the summer holiday season comes to an end, the conditions are there for a more active autumn market," said Tim Bannister, Rightmove's director of property science.

"The reaction from home-movers to what is hopefully only the first of several rate cuts over the next year or two, combined with other positive data and trends, has led us to raise our price prediction for the year."

19%
Rise in the number of potential buyers since 1 August compared with the same time a year ago

The figures come as high street lenders reduce the borrowing costs on new mortgages in anticipation of the central bank lowering interest rates. Rightmove said the average five-year fixed-rate mortgage is now 4.80% - still higher than three years ago, before the first of 14 consecutive rate hikes - but significantly down from 5.82% at this point in 2023.

The latest figure is the lowest since around Liz Truss's mini-budget in September 2022. Estate agents said that alongside the Bank cutting rates, increased political certainty after Labour's general election landslide in July and a brighter economic outlook were also helping with buyer interest.

Josephine Ashby, managing partner at John Bray Estate Agents in Cornwall, said: "We are seeing an improvement in buyer engagement as more certainty in the political and economic landscapes forms."

However, borrowing costs are still higher than three years ago, while housing costs remain a stretch for millions of families.

World 'could raise trillions' by copying Spain's tax on super-rich

Richard Partington

Governments copying Spain's wealth tax on the super-rich could raise more than $2tn (£1.5tn), according to campaigners calling for the money to help finance the climate transition.

As growing numbers of countries consider raising taxes on the ultra-wealthy, the Tax Justice Network campaign group said evidence from a "featherlight" tax on the 0.5% richest households in Spain could help raise trillions of dollars globally each year.

The Spanish government, under the socialist prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, introduced a temporary "solidarity" wealth tax in late 2022, which is collected in 2023 and 2024, on the net wealth of individuals exceeding €3m (£2.6m). It is estimated to apply to the richest 0.5%.

The Tax Justice Network said a similar tax on the top 0.5% wealthiest households worldwide, at a rate of 1.7% to 3.5%, would raise about $2.1tn. The study excluded some exemptions in the Spanish tax - including for shares in listed companies, intellectual property and industrial property, and some high-value assets. It said as much as $31bn a year would be raised in the UK.

It comes as the G20 explores plans for a global minimum tax on the world's 3,000 billionaires under the Brazilian presidency of leftwing leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. France, Germany, Spain and South Africa have indicated support.

However, reaching any agreement is likely to take years, and could face opposition in several countries.

Alison Schultz of the Tax Justice Network said: "A minority of rich countries still seem to be holding back from support for a robust framework convention on tax - despite this being the best opportunity that we've ever had, and one that their own people demand they act on with urgency."

The Tax Justice Network said previous reforms in some nations had not resulted in the super-rich relocating. As few as 0.01% of the richest households relocated after such reforms in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. A UK study estimated that 2017 changes to non-dom rules led to a migration rate of as low as 0.02%.

Rachel Reeves previously ruled out a wealth tax. However, the chancellor is abolishing non-dom status to raise more than £5bn and is thought to be considering increasing taxes on capital gains, inheritances, and pensions for the 30 October budget.

Norton scam victims paid £9.4m after years of delay

Simon Goodley

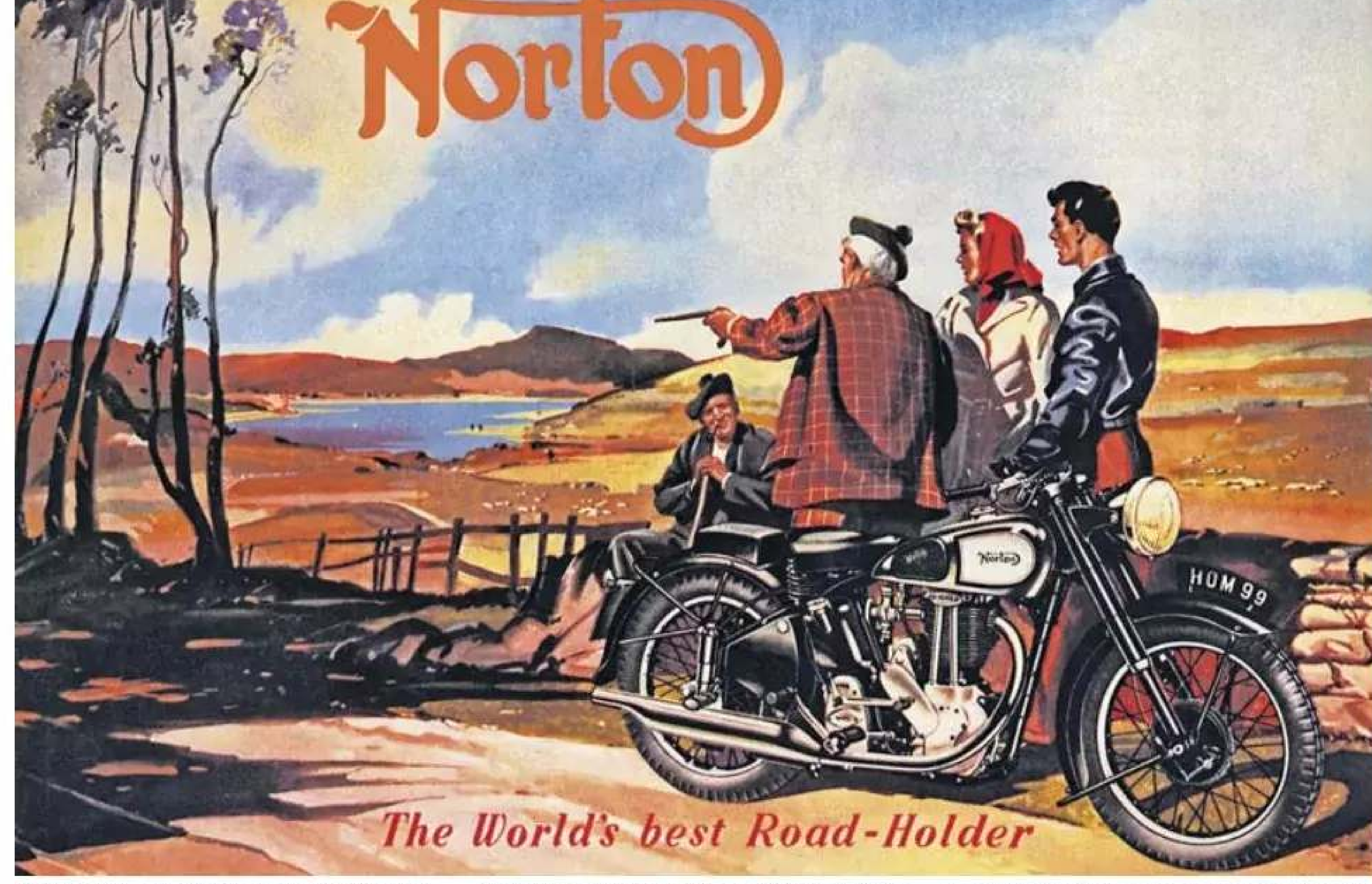
Victims of the Norton Motorcycles pension scandal have finally been paid £9.4m in compensation more than a decade after they had seemingly lost their life savings.

More than 200 people fell victim to what is known as a pensions liberation fraud during 2012 and 2013, when they were tricked into allowing about £11.5m to be transferred out of their retirement plans.

Their retirement savings were switched by the owner of Norton Motorcycles into his own business, where the money appears to have been spent paying the people behind the scam, buying cryptocurrencies and making cash withdrawals.

The Fraud Compensation Fund paid £9.4m to the collapsed schemes in March but the cash remained inaccessible to the victims as Dalriada, the trustee appointed by the Pensions Regulator in 2019 to manage the Norton schemes, calculated how much each scheme member was owed.

Payments were received last week, according to members contacted by the Guardian, although some of those affected did not live long enough to receive the award.



▲ *Norton, a British motoring brand dating back to the 19th century, went into administration in January 2020*
PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY

Billy Wallace, 59, said he was delighted to have received about £33,000 into a new personal Standard Life account, although he estimates his pension fund would now have been worth as much as £60,000.

"I've seen the printout, so I know it's there," he said. "But we have been through that much, until I see it in my own bank account that's when I'll believe it," he said.

Most of the victims' original retirement funds were transferred into three Norton pension schemes and then vanished after being switched directly into Norton's business, a heritage British motoring brand that dates back to the 19th century.

Stuart Garner acquired Norton with £1m borrowed directly from a pension fraud, received a further £10m that was raised via the pension liberation scam, and then illegally invested that pension money into his own business.

Norton collapsed into administration in January 2020 and five months later the Pensions Ombudsman ordered Garner to make a "restorative payment" to all of the scheme members, then thought to total about £14m including interest.

In 2022, Garner pleaded guilty to illegally investing millions of pounds of people's retirement savings. He received an eight-month prison sentence, suspended for two years. He has always said he is also a victim.

Savers could benefit as banks race to repay billions in Covid loans

Kalyeena Makortoff
Banking correspondent

Britain's biggest banks are facing a deadline to repay more than £100bn of pandemic-era loans, which experts say could benefit savers as banks and building societies compete for customers with attractive rates in a "messy" dash for cash.

More than 70 lenders ranging from high street banks and building societies such as HSBC and Nationwide to digital and specialist lenders such as Starling Bank and Aldermore collectively borrowed £193bn from the Bank of England as part of an emergency programme rolled out in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

The term funding scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises (TFSME), which predated the government's bounce back loan programme, was meant to encourage banks to keep lending to small businesses amid growing economic uncertainty. It boosted bank balance sheets at minimal cost, having been tied to the Bank of England's base rate, which was cut to a record low of 0.1%.

The central bank is now demanding that lenders repay their debts, with £100bn of the remaining £153bn worth of loans falling due over the next 18 months.

It means banks have to quickly decide how they will repay – or replace – billions of pounds of TFSME funding without leaving big holes in their balance sheets.

Barclays and Lloyds, which are the biggest borrowers, with about £18bn and £30bn outstanding respectively, say they will either dip into existing cash pools or are confident they can borrow at relatively low rates.

But smaller lenders will have to take a more expensive route by tapping wholesale markets, where they borrow from another financial institution; opting for securitisation, where they bundle customer loans and sell off slices to investors on the open market; or attracting fresh deposits from new and existing savings customers with enticing rates and deals.

Regardless of which path banks choose, the sudden surge in demand will force them to compete for funding, either from investors or savers.

"It highly likely that some banks will either look to replace [TFSME] with [more expensive] market-based wholesale funding or by competing more aggressively for deposits," the HSBC banking analyst Robin Down said in a research note. "Could this spill over into a renewed bout of deposit competition later this year? We think it's entirely possible."

While that is good news for savers, particularly when the Bank of England is starting to cut interest rates, it will put pressure on bank balance sheets and net interest margins, which are the difference between what is earned from loan charges and what is paid to savers – a key measure of profitability for lenders.

This point has not been lost on the Bank of England, which warned that replacing TFSME funding could prove a challenge, particularly at a time when it is trying to sell off its own pile of bonds in the open market.

Other lenders such as Metro Bank are trying to avoid the flurry of competition and are selling off assets to foot the bill. The lender, which borrowed £3bn in TFSME funding, announced last month that it was selling a £2.5bn mortgage book to NatWest to help settle its tab.

While it also aligned with Metro's new strategy to move out of standard residential mortgages, its chief executive, Daniel Frumkin, said it was a way to avoid a costly dash for cash that was likely to hurt profitability.

"There's a lot of TFSME outstanding – I mean a lot … and at some point banks are going to need to be able to find liquidity to repay it," Frumkin said. "I think competition on rate for deposits over the next 18 months is only going to increase."



▲ *Loans to high street banks such as HSBC and specialist lenders were meant to incentivise small business support* PHOTOGRAPH: NURPHOTO/GETTY

£193bn
Amount collectively borrowed by more than 70 UK lenders as part of an emergency programme in 2020

£100bn
Value of loans falling due over the next 18 months as the Bank of England demands repayment

The shape we're in Strong GDP growth is masking UK's deep structural issues

Larry Elliott
Economics editor

Britain had the fastest-growing economy in the G7 in the first half of this year. The unemployment rate is coming down and so is wage inflation. As Jim Callaghan never quite said as he arrived back in the country during the winter of discontent: Crisis? What crisis?

Last week's release of key economic indicators were not exactly supportive of the government's argument that it was handed a country in worse shape than at any time since 1945. That's quite a claim when quarterly growth is running at 0.6%, the annual inflation rate is 2.2% and unemployment is 4.2%.

Jeremy Hunt, the caretaker shadow chancellor, is making sure the government's argument doesn't go unanswered – which makes political sense for the Conservatives. When George Osborne made similar claims in 2010, Labour was too busy with a leadership contest to rebut them, with the result that they came to be accepted as fact, which they certainly weren't.

That said, this is not a case of boom-boom Britain either. Far from it, in fact. Ruth Gregory, a UK analyst at Capital Economics, puts it this way: "Overall, we are sceptical of talk that the UK is now experiencing 'Goldilocks' conditions. But it's clear that there has been a shift in the narrative away from weak growth and high inflation, towards stronger growth and weaker inflation."

That sums up the position pretty well. Things were getting better in the first half of 2024 (from a low base) and there is no harm in Labour admitting it.

Voters kicked the Tories out not because of the state of the economy but because of their record over 14 years. They will cut Rachel Reeves some slack in October's budget, even if she raises taxes, just as they did when Gordon Brown kept to the tough spending plans he inherited from Kenneth Clarke in 1997.

But Reeves needs to deploy the right argument. Her case should be that the Tories failed to tackle Britain's longstanding productivity, investment and trade deficits and that Labour can.

There is plenty of evidence to support that case. Dig a bit deeper and it is clear the Tories handed over an economy where the structural problems were as deep – and in some cases even more acute – than they were in 2010.

Let's start by unpicking the growth figures, where the 0.6% increase in activity in the second quarter was entirely due to a strong performance in the services sector. Manufacturing and construction both contracted. Although services make up about 80% of the economy, growth was unbalanced.

Britain has a poor record for business investment and – despite Hunt's generous tax breaks – there is not much evidence that companies are responding to a more benign economic backdrop with more capital expenditure. Business investment was down by 0.1% on the quarter and by 1.1% over the past year.

What's more, gross domestic product (GDP) is a poor gauge of how a country is doing. Even those who take it seriously as a measure would say that what matters is not GDP but GDP per head, and here the UK's recent record is distinctly unimpressive. Per capita GDP rose by 0.3% in the second quarter of 2024 but is more than 2% lower than it was before the start of the pandemic. That people are poorer than they were in 2020 has been masked by population growth.

The latest labour market figures show that the number of employees on payrolls rose by more than 250,000 over the past year but the UK's productivity performance has continued to be poor. Output an hour worked was 0.1% lower in the second quarter than a year earlier and is just over 2% higher than it was before the onset of the pandemic. It doesn't take a genius to draw the connection between weak investment, weak productivity and weak growth in per capita incomes.

> *It doesn't take a genius to connect weak investment, weak productivity and weak growth in per capita incomes*

A breakdown of the labour market figures by region provides evidence of a north-south divide. The employment rate across the whole of the UK is 74.5%. However, the rate is above average in the south of England, at just above 78%, whereas in Wales it is almost 10 points lower, at 68.9%. Scotland (73.4%), Northern Ireland (71.6%), the north-east (69%), the West Midlands (72.7%) and the north-west (73.1%) all have employment rates below the national average.

Parts of the UK that have traditionally been more dependent on manufacturing have markedly lower employment rates than services-heavy regions. So it should come as no surprise that the latest trade figures for the second quarter of 2024 show that the UK ran a huge £52.4bn deficit in goods, which was only partly offset by a £39.1bn surplus in services.

Once again, it is easy enough to join the dots. Manufacturing's share of the economy has been steadily falling for decades, with the result that the UK has not run a trade surplus in goods since the early 1980s. By contrast, the UK is second only to the US as an exporter of services, and the firms responsible for those exports – the banks, the management consultants, the architects – tend to be located in the south-east.

Put simply, the economy is going through a cyclical upswing, underpinned by the fact that wages are rising faster than prices and amid hopes that interest rates have further to fall.

That doesn't mean all the economy's problems have miraculously been solved, because that is obviously not the case. There are still structural challenges. Yet Labour is doing itself no favours by exaggerating how bad things currently are. It should tell it as it is.



▶ *Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves inherited longstanding economic problems more acute than in 2010*
PHOTOGRAPH: BELINDA JIAO/GETTY IMAGES

Manufacturers urge chancellor to boost infrastructure investment

Richard Partington
Economics correspondent

Rachel Reeves has been warned by Britain's biggest manufacturers that her autumn budget must address a decade of decline in national infrastructure that is damaging economic growth.

More than half of manufacturers surveyed by the industry group Make UK said the country's national road infrastructure had deteriorated in the last 10 years, making it slower and more expensive to build and export British products.

The survey of 390 firms by the trade body, which represents 20,000 industrial businesses across the UK, found three-quarters thought good road networks were important to supply chains, while 57% disagreed with Rishi Sunak's decision to scrap the northern leg of the HS2 high-speed rail project.

The report ahead of the chancellor's 30 October budget said the poor quality of the roads had resulted in increased logistics costs and created difficulties in labour mobility and access to skills.

The research revealed wide regional divisions in infrastructure quality, with businesses in the north of England more critical of the roads than elsewhere in the UK.

However, the study found there had been improvements in digital infrastructure over the past decade, after investment by the previous government in 5G connectivity and other new technologies.

Last month Reeves announced cuts to some infrastructure projects – including roads, railways and hospitals – after revealing a £22bn "hole" in the public finances that she claimed was left by the Conservatives. But Make UK said the chancellor needed to commit to long-term infrastructure projects to ensure the UK was attractive for international businesses and investors.

Stephen Phipson, the chief executive of Make UK, said: "Following years of underinvestment, this new government now needs to be bold on its infrastructure investment and realise the productivity improvements of doing so.

"At the top of this agenda must be repairing our roads, with British manufacturers wanting to see an immediate focus on A-roads and motorways.

"To help make this happen, manufacturers want to see more local decision-making and support for local authorities to speed up planning processes."

Phipson added: "Increased investment in local bus networks to connect out-of-town areas would also give more young people the chance to work in the well-paid manufacturing sector, while long-term rail projects are desperately needed to make more east-west connections to truly deliver an equal share of opportunities around the whole of the UK."

57%
Proportion of the 390 businesses surveyed that disagreed with the decision to scrap HS2's northern leg

Weather
Monday 19 August 2024

UK and Ireland Noon today

Sunny · Mist · Fog · Sunny intervals · Hazy · Mostly cloudy · Overcast/dull · Sunny showers · Sunny and heavy showers · Light showers · Rain · Sleet · Light snow · Snow showers · Heavy snow · Ice · Thundery rain · Thundery showers · Temperature, ºC · Wind speed, mph · Windy

35C · 30 · 25 · 20 · 15 · 10 · 5 · 0 · -5 · -10 · -15 · -20

Forecast

Low 14 High 17
Tomorrow

Low 11 High 19
Wednesday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

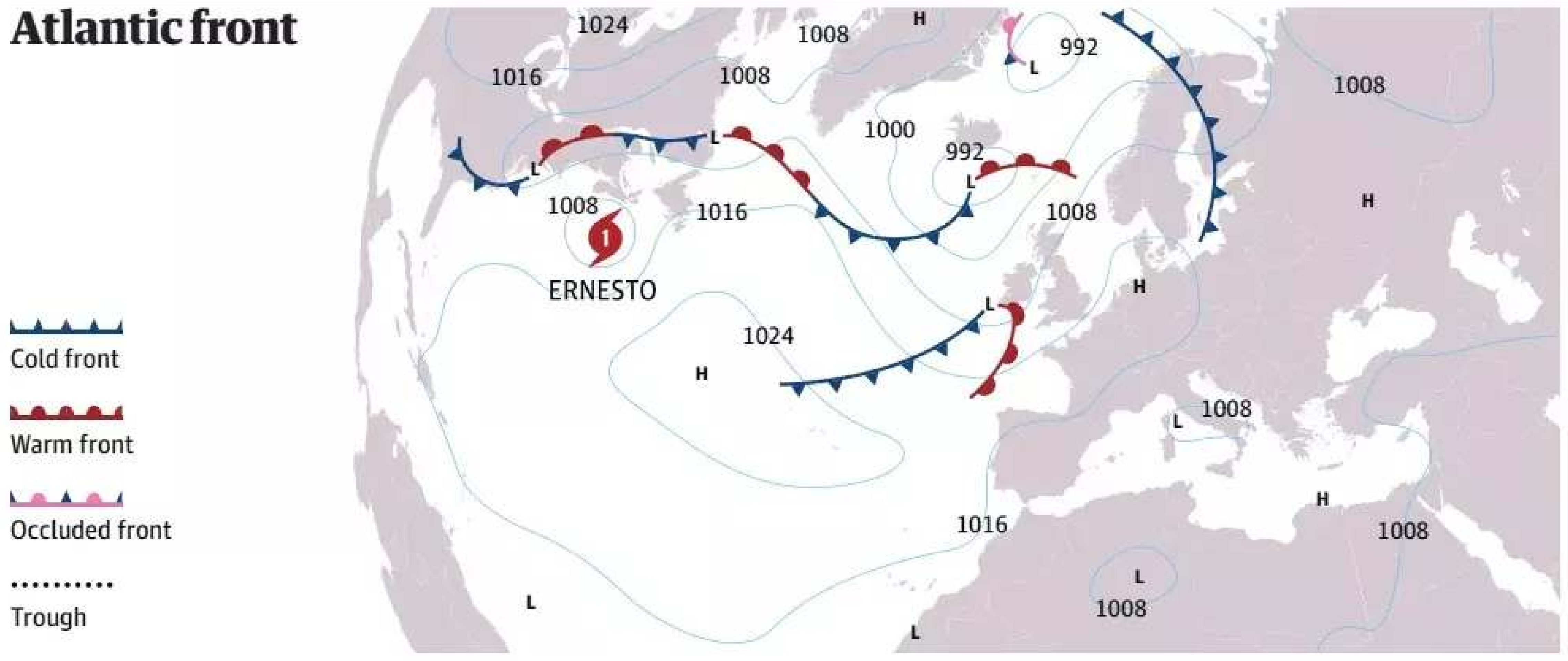
Latest	
17 Aug 2024	423.41
Weekly average	
11 Aug 2024	422.42
18 Aug 2023	419.03
18 Aug 2014	397.33
Pre-industrial base	280
Safe level	350

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
London	17 23	5%	Low
Manchester	14 20	25%	Low
Edinburgh	13 18	80%	Low
Belfast	11 16	90%	Low
Birmingham	15 21	55%	Low
Brighton	17 20	5%	Low
Bristol	15 20	70%	Low
Cardiff	15 21	90%	Low
Newcastle	13 19	60%	Low
Penzance	16 19	65%	Low

Atlantic front



High tides

Aberdeen	0132	4.1m	1410	4.2m
Avonmouth	0742	12.4m	2004	13.1m
Barrow	--	--	1200	8.8m
Belfast	1135	3.3m	2344	3.5m
Cobh	0550	3.8m	1814	4.1m
Cromer	0646	4.9m	1930	4.9m
Dover	1135	6.6m	2357	6.6m
Dublin	--	--	1210	3.9m
Galway	0535	4.8m	1747	5.3m
Greenock	0037	3.3m	1300	3.2m
Harwich	--	--	1216	3.8m
Holyhead	1057	5.3m	2307	5.8m
Hull	0634	7.3m	1916	7.3m
Leith	0249	5.3m	1522	5.5m
Liverpool	1143	8.9m	2356	9.5m
London Bridge	0207	6.9m	1435	6.8m
Lossiemouth	--	--	1239	4.0m
Milford Haven	0641	6.6m	1901	7.1m
Newquay	0533	6.6m	1752	7.1m
North Shields	0338	4.9m	1615	5.0m
Oban	0629	3.7m	1848	4.1m
Penzance	0505	5.2m	1725	5.6m
Plymouth	0614	5.1m	1829	5.5m
Portsmouth	--	--	1204	4.6m
Southport	1118	8.6m	2331	9.2m
Stornoway	0731	4.5m	1937	5.0m
Weymouth	0636	1.1m	1850	1.4m
Whitby	0412	5.4m	1648	5.5m
Wick	--	--	1203	3.3m
Workington	--	--	1205	7.9m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0552
Sun sets	2013
Moon rises	2031
Moon sets	0450
Full Moon	19 Aug

AccuWeather.com

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2024

Lighting up

Belfast	2047 to 0611
Birm'ham	2023 to 0559
Brighton	2012 to 0556
Bristol	2024 to 0605
Carlisle	2034 to 0556
Cork	2048 to 0627
Dublin	2044 to 0614
Glasgow	2044 to 0600
Harlech	2033 to 0607
Inverness	2048 to 0553
London	2013 to 0554
M'chester	2027 to 0558
Newcastle	2030 to 0551
Norwich	2011 to 0546
Penzance	2032 to 0620

Starwatch

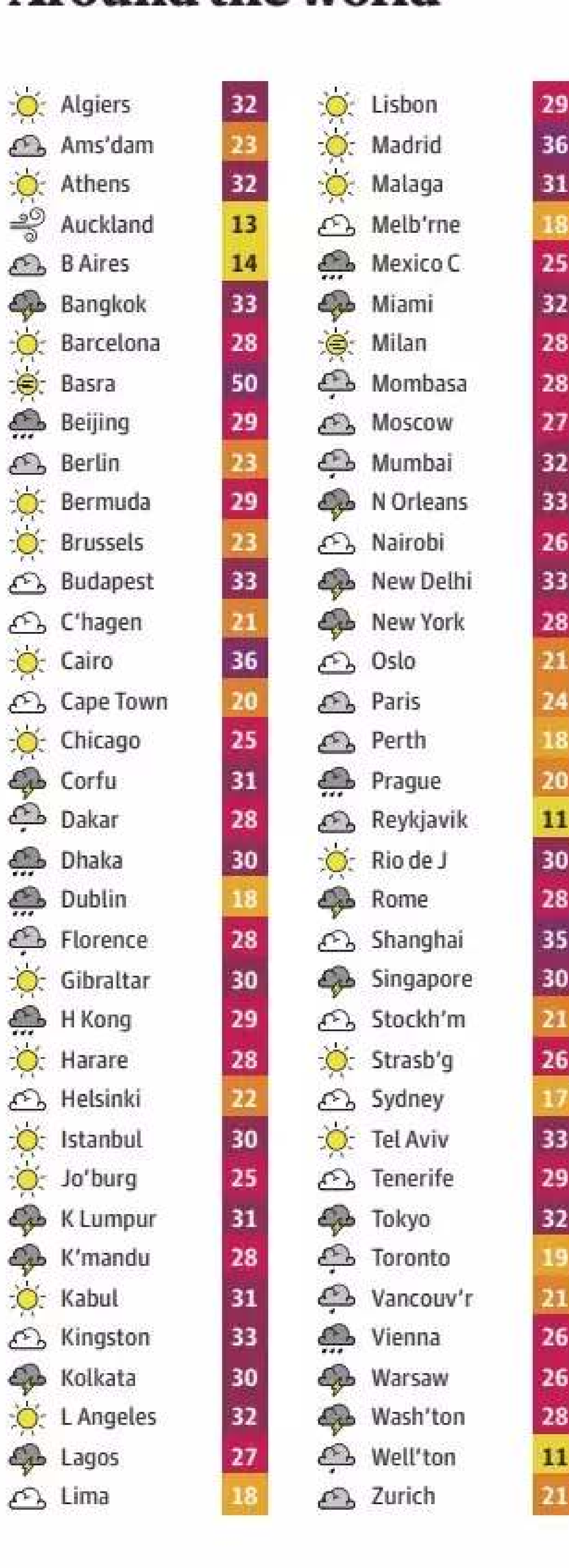
This week affords us a great view of the constellation Aquila, the eagle. According to Greek mythology, Aquila is the bird that carried Zeus's thunderbolt. It is one of the 48 constellations originally recorded by the astronomer Ptolemy in the second century.

Its brightest star, Altair, is one of the closest stars to Earth visible to the naked eye, at a distance of approximately 17 light years. There are other stars closer, but these are mostly faint red dwarfs that require telescopes to bring them into view.

Altair forms part of the Summer Triangle along with Vega in Lyra, the lyre, and Deneb in the constellation Cygnus, the swan. With Tarazed and Alshain, Altair marks the eagle's tail feathers and body. The wings stretch out to both sides and the tail culminates in the star Al Thalimain Prior.

The chart shows the view looking south from London all week. **Stuart Clark**

Around the world



Algiers	32	Lisbon	29
Ams'dam	23	Madrid	36
Athens	32	Malaga	31
Auckland	13	Melb'rne	18
B Aires	14	Mexico C	25
Bangkok	33	Miami	32
Barcelona	28	Milan	28
Basra	50	Mombasa	28
Beijing	29	Moscow	27
Berlin	23	Mumbai	32
Bermuda	29	N Orleans	33
Brussels	23	Nairobi	26
Budapest	33	New Delhi	33
C'hagen	21	New York	28
Cairo	36	Oslo	21
Cape Town	20	Paris	24
Chicago	25	Perth	18
Corfu	31	Prague	20
Dakar	28	Reykjavik	11
Dhaka	30	Rio de J	30
Dublin	18	Rome	28
Florence	28	Shanghai	35
Gibraltar	30	Singapore	30
H Kong	29	Stockh'm	21
Harare	28	Strasb'g	26
Helsinki	22	Sydney	17
Istanbul	30	Tel Aviv	33
Jo'burg	25	Tenerife	29
K Lumpur	31	Tokyo	32
K'mandu	28	Toronto	19
Kabul	31	Vancouv'r	21
Kingston	33	Vienna	26
Kolkata	30	Warsaw	26
L Angeles	32	Wash'ton	28
Lagos	27	Well'ton	11
Lima	18	Zurich	21

Rugby league
Weekend in Leeds fails to conjure up much Magic
Page 35 →

Football
Solanke backed to spark Tottenham's top-four pursuit
Page 38 →



Sport



▲ *The president of Botswana declared a national holiday after Letsile Tebogo won gold in the men's 200m in Paris*
BEN STANSALL/AFP/GETTY

Feeling the joy

Sport offers a framework of fun and meaning in our chaotic world

Jason Stockwood



The summer months offer a pause in the rhythm of my life. The school year ends, home life shifts and at least in principle the weather changes. For those of us who find solace in the football pages, summer is a moment to catch our breath between seasons. Yet even in this lull I find myself drawn to the Olympics, captivated by sports I barely recognise and quickly forget for the four years between Games.

Like many, I become a fan of BMX, women's rugby sevens, synchronised diving or any gymnastics event for two weeks every four years. This brief, intense passion hibernates until the next Olympics. It's an enjoyable distraction, a temporary escape, but in truth it's also a way to fill the void left by football's absence, a sport that for better or worse shapes much of my life.

I often wonder how healthy this relationship with football is. The Olympics stave off the withdrawal from football. I spend far too much time seeking meaning in what is an arbitrary game. I wonder how my life might be better if I didn't spend so much time aligning my schedule to football fixtures, or obsessing over where our team can strengthen or whether our pitches can be improved. Sometimes, I imagine that life might be simpler if I fell in love with a less consuming sport, such as one I've just watched. Maybe climbing.

This summer, while I hoped to take a breath, I found myself holding it; deeply troubled by the news of far-right riots that had more than a few echoes of the football hooliganism of the 1980s, as set out by Simon Kuper in the FT. Tribalism sparked by the false claim that an asylum seeker was responsible for horrific murders in Southport. This lie incited violence that left me angered and depressed. Eventually this turned to hope and pride as communities rallied together, showing us a glimpse of what our country really is.

We all search for a narrative in our lives that offers coherence and hope. We then cling to it like a lifeboat. Politicians have a crucial role in showing strength in enforcing the law but more importantly offering a vision of a future that works for everyone. Stability and hope are necessary to weather storms. Fear, chaos and violence are the winds that blow through to our bones.

We are meaning-seeking creatures and this is especially evident in our engagement with sport. Viktor Frankl, in his seminal work Man's Search for Meaning, argues that the primary drive in human life is not pleasure, as Freud suggested, or power, as Nietzsche proposed, but the pursuit of meaning. Frankl's experiences as a Holocaust survivor taught him that even in the most horrifying circumstances, individuals somehow found purpose by identifying a deeper sense of meaning in their suffering.

This idea resonates when we consider the narratives woven through sport, particularly the Olympics and the beginning of a new football season. Athletes endure gruelling training and sometimes confront defeat, yet they persist in their pursuit of victory because it offers them a profound sense of purpose. They dedicate their lives to perfecting their craft, often for a moment of glory. For us as spectators these moments provide a sense of possibility and connection. We look to those athletes who embody our ideals, represent us as a town or nation and may even inspire us to strive for excellence in our own lives. These grand narratives of triumph and defeat somehow provide a canvas for us to project our own hopes, dreams and fears.

But there's also a more straightforward reason sport matters. On the way to the first game of the season at Fleetwood, I was chatting with a good friend who runs a trust of academies in an inner city. He said that over the past decade there has been less joy in teaching and classrooms. He attributes this to the structure imposed by governments which have stifled the joy that should be part of education. It's why sport is a crucial part of the solution; it offers the opportunity to have fun. In an age of amplified social media anger and the relentless pursuit of success, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that having fun can be enough.

> *I imagine that life might be simpler if I fell in love with a less consuming sport than football, maybe climbing*

Beyond the achievements of elite athletes, joy in sport often emerges in smaller yet equally profound victories. Moments such as when the president of Botswana declared a national holiday to celebrate Letsile Tebogo's 200m victory. Or when Cindy Ngamba, representing the Refugee Olympic Team, became the team's first medallist in boxing, her victory a beacon of hope for millions. And there are lighter moments, such as in the women's beach volleyball final when a tense exchange between the players was diffused by the DJ playing the John Lennon song Imagine. The saccharine lyrics brought the crowd into a moment of mass karaoke and the players couldn't help but smile.

Sport provides a powerful framework for fun and meaning. Whether it's the fleeting passion of the Olympics or an enduring commitment to Grimsby Town, our engagement reflects our deepest desires. As the football season begins, there is a chance to embrace this opportunity to create new narratives, find meaning in the shared experience of sport and, most importantly, to remember it is all supposed to be fun.

Jason Stockwood is the vice-chair of Grimsby Town

The week ahead

Lilia Vu defends her 2023 Women's Open crown at St Andrews

Today

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Premier League
Leicester v Tottenham (8pm)
Sky Sports Premier League
Vanarama National League South
Aveley v Hemel Hempstead; Chelmsford v Tonbridge Angels
Tennis
ATP Winston-Salem Open
North Carolina, USA (to Sun)
Sky Sports Tennis
WTA Cleveland Championships
Ohio, USA (to Sat) *Sky Sports Tennis*
WTA Monterrey Open
Nuevo León, Mexico (to Sat)
Sky Sports Tennis
Cycling
Vuelta a España
Spain (to 8 Sep) *Eurosport 1*
Racing
Catterick, Great Yarmouth, Windsor, Worcester

Tomorrow

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Bristol Street Motors EFL Trophy
Northern Barnsley v Man Utd U21 (7pm) *Sky Sports+*; Chesterfield v Manchester City U21 (7pm) *Sky Sports+*; Rotherham v Mansfield (7pm) *Sky Sports+*; Salford City v Port Vale (7pm) *Sky Sports+*; Tranmere v Everton U21 (7pm) *Sky Sports+*
Southern AFC Wimbledon v Wycombe *Sky Sports+*; Crawley v Brighton U21 *Sky Sports+*; Burton Albion v Leicester U21 (7pm) *Sky Sports+*; Bristol Rovers v Tottenham U21 (7pm); Reading v West Ham U21 (7pm) *Sky Sports+*; Shrewsbury v Fulham U21 (7.30pm) *Sky Sports+*; Stevenage v Crystal Palace U21 (7pm) *Sky Sports+*
Vanarama National League
Barnet v Forest Green; Braintree v Aldershot; Eastleigh v Solihull Moors; Halifax v Gateshead; Maidenhead v Altrincham; Oldham v Fylde; Southend v Boston; Tamworth v Hartlepool; Wealdstone v Sutton; Woking v Dag & Red; Yeovil v Ebbsfleet; York v Rochdale
Vanarama National League North
Buxton v Darlington; Chester v Radcliffe; Chorley v Scarborough; Curzon Ashton v Oxford City; Hereford v Peterborough Sports; Kidderminster v Brackley; King's Lynn v Rushall Olympic; Leamington v Alfreton; Marine v Farsley Celtic; Needham Market v Scunthorpe; South Shields v Warrington; Spennymoor v Southport
Vanarama National League South
Bath City v Torquay; Chesham v Weston-super-Mare; Dorking v Boreham Wood; Enfield v Slough; Farnborough v Eastbourne Borough; Hornchurch v St Albans; Maidstone v Hampton & Richmond; Salisbury v Truro; Weymouth v Chippenham
Cricket
Third Women's ODI
Ireland v Sri Lanka, Belfast (10.45am)
Racing
Brighton, Kempton, Nottingham, Wolverhampton

Wednesday

Cricket
First Test (first day of five)
England v Sri Lanka, Emirates Old Trafford (11am) *Sky Sports Cricket*
First Test (first day of five)
Pakistan v Bangladesh, Rawalpindi (6am)
Racing
Carlisle, Kempton, Worcester, York

Thursday

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Sky Bet League Two
Notts County v Grimsby (8pm)
Sky Sports Football
Cricket (11am unless stated)
Vitality County Championship
(first day of four)
Division One Durham v Nottinghamshire, Riverside; Hampshire v Essex, Rose Bowl; Surrey v Lancashire, the Oval; Warwickshire v Somerset, Edgbaston; Worcestershire v Kent, New Road
Division Two Derbyshire v Glamorgan, Derby; Gloucestershire v Leicestershire, Bristol; Middlesex v Northamptonshire, Northwood; Yorkshire v Sussex, Scarborough
Golf
BMW Championship
Denver, Colorado (to Sun)
Sky Sports Golf
Danish Championship
Nimtofte (to Sun) *Sky Sports+*
AIG Women's Open
St Andrews, Scotland (to Sun)
Racing
Chelmsford, Lingfield, Newcastle, Newton Abbot, York

Friday

Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Sky Bet Championship
Sheffield Wed v Leeds (8pm)
Sky Sports Football
Vanarama National League
Dag & Red v Halifax
Rugby league
Betfred Super League
Castleford v Warrington (8pm) *Sky Sports+*; Leeds v Catalans Dragons (8pm); St Helens v Hull KR (8pm) *Sky Sports+*
Cricket (8pm unless stated)
First T20 International
West Indies v South Africa, Tarouba
Racing
Ffos Las, Goodwood, Hamilton, Newmarket, York

Saturday

Football (3pm unless stated)
Premier League
Aston Villa v Arsenal (5.30pm) *Sky Sports Premier League*; Brighton v Manchester Utd (12.30pm) *TNT Sports 1*; Crystal Palace v West Ham; Fulham v Leicester; Manchester City v Ipswich; Southampton v Nottingham Forest; Tottenham v Everton
Sky Bet Championship
Blackburn v Oxford Utd; Bristol City v Coventry (12.30pm) *Sky Sports+*; Hull v Millwall (12.30pm) *Sky Sports+*; Middlesbrough v Portsmouth; Norwich v Sheffield Utd; Preston v Luton; QPR v Plymouth (12.30) *SSF*; Stoke v West Brom; Sunderland v Burnley; Watford v Derby
Sky Bet League One
Barnsley v Northampton; Burton Albion v Stevenage (12.30pm) *Sky Sports+*; Cambridge Utd v Blackpool; Charlton v Bolton; Exeter v Peterborough Utd; Huddersfield v Shrewsbury; Leyton Orient v Birmingham; Lincoln City v Mansfield; Stockport v Bristol Rovers (12.30pm) *Sky Sports+*; Wigan v Crawley; Wrexham v Reading; Wycombe v Rotherham
Sky Bet League Two
Barrow v Port Vale; Bradford City v Bromley; Cheltenham v AFC Wimbledon; Chesterfield v Salford City; Colchester v Harrogate; Crewe v Swindon (12.30pm) *Sky Sports+*; Doncaster v Morecambe; Fleetwood v Gillingham; MK Dons v Carlisle; Newport County v Accrington Stanley; Tranmere v Walsall (12.30pm) *Sky Sports+*
Vanarama National League
Aldershot v Oldham; Altrincham v Eastleigh; Barnet v Southend; Boston v Tamworth; Ebbsfleet v Woking; Fylde v Maidenhead; Gateshead v Yeovil (12.30pm); Hartlepool v Wealdstone; Rochdale v Forest Green; Solihull Moors v Braintree; Sutton v York
Vanarama National League North
Alfreton v Chester; Brackley v Curzon Ashton; Darlington v Leamington; Marine v King's Lynn; Oxford City v South Shields; Peterborough Sports v Buxton; Radcliffe v Needham Market; Rushall Olympic v Spennymoor; Scarborough v Farsley Celtic; Scunthorpe v Chorley; Southport v Hereford; Warrington v Kidderminster
Vanarama National League South
Boreham Wood v Weymouth; Chippenham v Maidstone; Eastbourne Borough v Aveley; Hampton & Richmond v Salisbury; Hemel Hempstead v Worthing; Slough v Hornchurch; St Albans v Chesham; Tonbridge Angels v Bath City; Torquay v Dorking; Truro v Enfield; Welling v Farnborough; Weston-super-Mare v Chelmsford
William Hill Scottish Premiership
Aberdeen v Kilmarnock; Dundee Utd v St Johnstone; Hibernian v Dundee; Rangers v Ross County
William Hill Scottish Championship
Airdrieonians v Queen's Park; Ayr v Raith; Falkirk v Partick; Hamilton v Dunfermline; Livingston v Morton
William Hill Scottish League One
Annan Athletic v Alloa; Dumbarton v Arbroath; Kelty Hearts v Inverness CT; Montrose v Queen of the South (5.30pm); Stenhousemuir v Cove
William Hill Scottish League Two
Bonnyrigg Rose v Clyde; Forfar v Edinburgh City; Spartans v Peterhead; Stirling v East Fife; Stranraer v Elgin
Rugby league
Betfred Super League
Salford v Huddersfield (2pm)
Sky Sports+
Betfred Championship
Featherstone Rovers v Toulouse (6pm)
Formula One
Dutch Grand Prix qualifying
Zandvoort (2pm) *Sky Sports F1*
Racing
Cartmel, Goodwood, Newmarket, Redcar, Windsor, York

Sunday

Football (3pm unless stated)
Premier League
Bournemouth v Newcastle (2pm) *Sky Sports Premier League*; Liverpool v Brentford (4.30pm) *Sky Sports Premier League*; Wolves v Chelsea (2pm)
Sky Bet Championship
Swansea v Cardiff *Sky Sports Football*
William Hill Scottish Premiership
Motherwell v Hearts; St Mirren v Celtic (noon) *Sky Sports Football*
Rugby league (3pm unless stated)
Betfred Super League
London Broncos v Leigh *Sky Sports+*; Wigan v Hull FC *Sky Sports+*
Betfred Championship
Barrow v Swinton; Dewsbury v Whitehaven; Doncaster v Bradford; Halifax v Wakefield; Widnes v Sheffield; York v Batley
Cricket
Second T20 International
West Indies v South Africa, Tarouba (8pm)
Formula One
Dutch Grand Prix
Zandvoort (2pm) *Sky Sports F1*
Racing
Beverley, Goodwood, Great Yarmouth

The main event

England v Sri Lanka

11am, Wednesday, Sky Sports Cricket

Ollie Pope steps in for the injured Ben Stokes as captain when England begin the three-match series against Sri Lanka



Football results

Premier League

		P	Home W	D	L	F	A	Away W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts	Form
1	Brighton	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	+3	3	W
2	Arsenal	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	+2	3	W
3	Liverpool	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	+2	3	W
4	Manchester City	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	+2	3	W
5	Aston Villa	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3	W
6	Brentford	1	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	+1	3	W
7	Manchester United	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	+1	3	W
8	Newcastle	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	+1	3	W
9	Bournemouth	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	D
10	Nottingham Forest	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	D
11	Leicester	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
12	Tottenham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
13	Crystal Palace	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0	L
14	West Ham	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	L
15	Fulham	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0	L
16	Southampton	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0	L
17	Chelsea	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	-2	0	L
18	Ipswich	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	-2	0	L
19	Wolves	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0	L
20	Everton	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	-3	0	L

Arsenal (1) **2** Havertz 25, Saka 74 — **Wolves** (0) **0** 60,261

Brentford (1) **2** Mbeumo 29, Wissa 76 — **Crystal Palace** (0) **1** Pinnock 56og 16,988

Chelsea (0) **0** — **Manchester City** (1) **2** Haaland 18, Kovacic 84 39,818

Everton (0) **0** — **Brighton** (1) **3** Mitoma 26, Welbeck 56, Adingra 87

Ipswich (0) **0** — **Liverpool** (0) **2** Jota 60, Salah 65 30,014

Newcastle (1) **1** Joelinton 45 — **Southampton** (0) **0** 52,196

Nottingham Forest (1) **1** Wood 23 — **Bournemouth** (0) **1** Semenyo 86 29,763

West Ham (1) **1** Paquetá 37pen — **Aston Villa** (1) **2** Onana 4, Durán 79 62,463

(Played on Friday)

Manchester United (0) **1** Zirkzee 87 — **Fulham** (0) **0** 73,297

Scotland

PREMIER SPORTS LEAGUE CUP
Second round

Aberdeen (0) **1** Keskinen 90+2 — **Queen's Park** (0) **0** 8,939

Celtic (2) **3** Maeda 4 15, Kühn 56 — **Hibernian** (1) **1** Kukharevych 34

Dundee (2) **6** Palmer-Houlden 12, McGhee 40, Tiffoney 61, Portales 74, Main 86, Cameron 90+1 — **Airdrieonians** (0) **1** Frizzell 76 3,327

Dundee Utd (1) **1** Graham 34 — **St Mirren** (0) **0** 4,285

Falkirk (0) **2** Ross 53, Tait 82 — **Hearts** (0) **0** 6,653

Motherwell (0) **1** Ebiye 96 — **Kilmarnock** (0) **0** 4,371 (aet)

Rangers (0) **2** Dessers 61, McCausland 90+2 — **St Johnstone** (0) **0**

Spartans (0) **1** Henderson 46 — **Ross County** (0) **0** 712

WILLIAM HILL CHAMPIONSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Ayr	3	3	0	0	10	2	+8	9
Falkirk	2	2	0	0	4	1	+3	6
Livingston	2	1	1	0	3	1	+2	4
Raith	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Airdrieonians	2	1	0	1	1	5	-4	3
Morton	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Queen's Park	2	0	1	1	2	3	-1	1
Partick	2	0	1	1	0	1	-1	1
Hamilton	3	0	1	2	2	5	-3	1
Dunfermline	2	0	0	2	0	4	-4	0

Ayr 3 Hamilton 2

WILLIAM HILL LEAGUE ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Kelty Hearts	3	2	1	0	6	1	+5	7
Queen of the South	3	2	1	0	4	1	+3	7
Annan	3	2	0	1	4	3	+1	6
Alloa	3	1	2	0	4	3	+1	5
Dumbarton	3	0	3	0	5	5	0	3
Montrose	3	0	3	0	2	2	0	3
Stenhousemuir	3	1	0	2	2	4	-2	3
Inverness CT	3	0	2	1	2	3	-1	2
Cove Rangers	3	0	1	2	3	6	-3	1
Arbroath	3	0	1	2	1	5	-4	1

Alloa 1 Stenhousemuir 0; Arbroath 0 Kelty Hearts 3; Cove Rangers 1 Dumbarton 1; Inverness CT 1 Montrose 1; Queen of the South 2 Annan Athletic 0

WILLIAM HILL LEAGUE TWO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Peterhead	3	3	0	0	4	1	+3	9
Elgin	2	2	0	0	5	2	+3	6
Stirling Albion	3	2	0	1	4	2	+2	6
East Fife	3	2	0	1	6	5	+1	6
Spartans	2	1	1	0	4	2	+2	4
Clyde	3	1	1	1	1	2	-1	4
Forfar	3	0	1	2	2	4	-2	1
Stranraer	3	0	1	2	2	4	-2	1
Edinburgh City	3	0	1	2	3	6	-3	1
Bonnyrigg Rose	3	0	1	2	2	5	-3	1

Clyde 0 Stirling Albion 2; East Fife 2 Forfar 1; Edinburgh City 2 Bonnyrigg Rose 2; Peterhead 1 Stranraer 0

HIGHLAND LEAGUE
Banks O'Dee 1 Inverurie Loco Works 1; Brechin 2 Huntly 1; Buckie Thistle 2 Wick Academy 2; Clachnacuddin 0 Fraserburgh 0; Deveronvale 3 Strathspey Thistle 2; Formartine 2 Forres Mechanics 3; Keith 0 Turriff 1; Lossiemouth 0 Brora 2. **Friday** Nairn County 2 Rothes 3.
Leading standings: 1 Brora Rangers P5 Pts 15; **2** Brechin City P5 Pts 13; **3** Banks O'Dee P5 Pts 11; **4** Inverurie Loco Works P5 Pts 10; **5** Turriff Utd P5 Pts 10

LOWLAND LEAGUE
Cowdenbeath 1 East Kilbride 4; Gretna 0 Celtic B 1.
Friday Hearts B 6 Berwick 1.
Leading standings: 1 Celtic B P5 Pts 13; **2** East Kilbride P5 Pts 12; **3** Hearts B P5 Pts 12; **4** Caledonian Braves P4 Pts 10; **5** Berwick P5 Pts 10

Other football

LA LIGA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Rayo Vallecano	1	1	0	0	2	0	+2	3
Barcelona	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
Celta Vigo	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
Las Palmas	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
Sevilla	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
Athletic Bilbao	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Getafe	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Girona	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Leganés	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Mallorca	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Osasuna	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Real Betis	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Real Madrid	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Atlético Madrid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Espanyol	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Valladolid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Villarreal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alavés	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
Valencia	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
Real Sociedad	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0

Mallorca L Real Madrid L; Osasuna 1 Leganés 1; Real Sociedad 0 Rayo Vallecano 2; Valencia 1 Barcelona 2. **Friday** Celta Vigo 2 Alavés 1; Las Palmas 2 Sevilla 2

SERIE A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Verona	1	1	0	0	3	0	+3	3
Lazio	1	1	0	0	3	1	+2	3
Milan	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
Genoa	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
Internazionale	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
Torino	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
Bologna	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Fiorentina	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Parma	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Udinese	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Cagliari	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Empoli	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Monza	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Roma	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Atalanta	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Como	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Juventus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lecce	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Venezia	1	0	0	1	1	3	-2	0
Napoli	1	0	0	1	0	3	-3	0

Bologna 1 Udinese 1; Cagliari 0 Roma 0; Empoli 0 Monza 0; Genoa 2 Internazionale 2; Lazio 3 Venezia 1; Milan 2 Torino 2; Parma 1 Fiorentina 1; Verona 3 Napoli 0

LIGUE 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Marseille	1	1	0	0	5	1	+4	3
Paris St-Germain	1	1	0	0	4	1	+3	3
Rennes	1	1	0	0	3	0	+3	3
Lille	1	1	0	0	2	0	+2	3
Auxerre	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
Lens	1	1	0	0	1	0	+1	3
Monaco	1	1	0	0	1	0	+1	3
Strasbourg	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Montpellier	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Toulouse	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Nantes	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Nice	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
St Étienne	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
Angers	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
Reims	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
Le Havre	1	0	0	1	1	4	-3	0
Lyon	1	0	0	1	0	3	-3	0
Brest	1	0	0	1	1	5	-4	0

Angers 0 Lens 1; Auxerre 2 Nice 1; Brest 1 Marseille 5; Monaco 1 St Étienne 0; Montpellier 1 Strasbourg 1; Reims 0 Lille 2; Rennes 3 Lyon 0; Toulouse 0 Nantes 0. **Friday** Le Havre 1 PSG 4

EREDIVISIE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
PSV Eindhoven	2	2	0	0	8	2	+6	6
Fortuna Sittard	2	2	0	0	5	0	+5	6
Groningen	2	2	0	0	6	2	+4	6
AZ Alkmaar	2	2	0	0	2	0	+2	6
Feyenoord	2	1	1	0	6	2	+4	4
Willem II	2	1	1	0	3	1	+2	4
Twente	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
Utrecht	2	1	1	0	2	1	+1	4
Ajax	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
NAC Breda	2	1	0	1	3	5	-2	3
Sparta Rotterdam	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
Heerenveen	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1
Heracles	2	0	1	1	1	3	-2	1
NEC Nijmegen	2	0	0	2	1	3	-2	0
Almere	2	0	0	2	0	4	-4	0
Go Ahead Eagles	2	0	0	2	0	4	-4	0
RKC Waalwijk	2	0	0	2	2	7	-5	0
PEC Zwolle	2	0	0	2	1	6	-5	0

AZ Alkmaar 1 NEC Nijmegen 0; Heerenveen 1 Utrecht 1; Heracles 1 PSV 3; NAC Breda 2 Ajax 1; PEC Zwolle 1 Feyenoord 5; RKC Waalwijk 1 Groningen 2; Twente 1 Sparta 1; Willem II 2 Go Ahead Eagles 0. **Friday** Fortuna Sittard 3 Almere 0

CYMRU PREMIER

(top six)	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Haverfordwest	2	2	0	0	3	1	2	6
Newtown	2	1	1	0	4	1	3	4
Bala Town	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
Penybont	2	1	1	0	2	0	2	4
Cardiff MU	2	1	1	0	3	2	1	4
The New Saints	1	1	0	0	4	1	3	3

Caernarfon 1 Haverfordwest 2. **Friday** Aberystwyth 1 Connah's Quay 1; Bala 2 Briton Ferry 0; Cardiff Met Uni 1 Barry 1; Flint 1 The New Saints 4; Penybont 0 Newtown 0

NIFL SPORTS DIRECT PREMIERSHIP

(top six)	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Linfield	2	2	0	0	5	1	4	6
Cliftonville	2	2	0	0	3	1	2	6
Coleraine	2	1	1	0	5	3	2	4
Loughgall	1	1	0	0	3	0	3	3
Crusaders	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
Glentoran	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3

Crusaders P Larne P; Glenavon 1 Cliftonville 2; Linfield 3 Dungannon Swifts 1; Loughgall 3 Carrick 0; Portadown 1 Glentoran 2 **Friday** Coleraine 4 Ballymena 2

Sky Bet Championship

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Burnley	2	2	0	0	9	1	+8	6
Sunderland	2	2	0	0	6	0	+6	6
Watford	2	2	0	0	6	2	+4	6
Blackburn	2	1	1	0	6	4	+2	4
West Brom	2	1	1	0	3	1	+2	4
Bristol City	2	1	1	0	5	4	+1	4
Swansea	2	1	0	1	3	1	+2	3
Oxford Utd	2	1	0	1	4	3	+1	3
Sheffield Wednesday	2	1	0	1	4	4	0	3
Coventry	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
Middlesbrough	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Derby	2	1	0	1	3	4	-1	3
Stoke	2	1	0	1	1	3	-2	3
Sheffield Utd*	2	1	1	0	4	2	+2	2
Portsmouth	2	0	2	0	3	3	0	2
Leeds	2	0	2	0	3	3	0	2
Hull	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2
QPR	2	0	1	1	3	5	-2	1
Norwich	2	0	1	1	2	4	-2	1
Luton	2	0	1	1	1	4	-3	1
Plymouth	2	0	1	1	1	5	-4	1
Millwall	2	0	0	2	5	7	-2	0
Preston	2	0	0	2	0	5	-5	0
Cardiff	2	0	0	2	0	7	-7	0

Sheffield Utd deducted 2pts

Bristol City (2) 4 Mehmeti 3, Armstrong 12, Mayulu 78, Twine 88 — **Millwall** (0) 3 Esse 51, Bradshaw 54pen, Watmore 64 — 20,733

Burnley (2) 5 Horvath 9og, Koleosho 31, Brownhill 51, Amdouni 88, Gudmundsson 90+2 — **Cardiff** (0) 0 — 19,759

Derby (1) 1 Jackson 14 — **Middlesbrough** (0) 0 — 29,443

Norwich (0) 2 Sargent 65, Sainz 73 — **Blackburn** (1) 2 Hedges 20, Ohashi 88 — 26,400

Plymouth (0) 1 Cissoko 52 — **Hull** (0) 1 Coyle 63 — 16,306

Portsmouth (0) 0 — **Luton** (0) 0 — 20,293

Sheffield United (2) 2 Hamer 6, Moore 13 — **QPR** (0) 2 Dunne 55, Dykes 88 — 27,527

Sunderland (3) 4 Cirkin 11, Mayenda 15 47, O'Nien 24 — **Sheffield Wednesday** (0) 0 — 40,022

Swansea (1) 3 Grimes 40pen, Abdulai 61, Vipotnik 83 — **Preston** (0) 0 — 14,037

Watford (0) 3 Kayembe 47 73, Andrews 49 — **Stoke** (0) 0 — 18,789

West Brom (0) 0 — **Leeds** (0) 0 — 25,329

(Played on Friday)

Coventry (2) 3 Wright 15 90+6, Van Ewijk 31 — **Oxford Utd** (1) 2 Brown 22, Harris 55 — 28,051

Sky Bet League One

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Stockport	2	2	0	0	5	0	+5	6
Huddersfield	2	2	0	0	4	1	+3	6
Crawley	2	2	0	0	3	1	+2	6
Charlton	2	2	0	0	2	0	+2	6
Reading	2	1	1	0	3	1	+2	4
Mansfield	2	1	1	0	5	4	+1	4
Birmingham	2	1	1	0	4	3	+1	4
Wrexham	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
Bolton	2	1	1	0	2	1	+1	4
Bristol Rovers	2	1	1	0	1	0	+1	4
Peterborough Utd	2	1	0	1	4	3	+1	3
Lincoln	2	1	0	1	4	4	0	3
Barnsley	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
Exeter	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Northampton	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Stevenage	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Burton	2	0	1	1	5	6	-1	1
Rotherham	2	0	1	1	0	1	-1	1
Wycombe	2	0	0	2	4	6	-2	0
Leyton Orient	2	0	0	2	1	3	-2	0
Cambridge Utd	2	0	0	2	0	3	-3	0
Wigan	2	0	0	2	0	3	-3	0
Blackpool	2	0	0	2	1	5	-4	0
Shrewsbury	2	0	0	2	1	5	-4	0

Blackpool (0) 0 — **Stockport** (0) 3 Barry 67, Fevrier 84, Olaofe 90+4 — 12,567

Bolton (0) 0 — **Wrexham** (0) 0 — 25,957

Cambridge Utd (0) 0 — **Crawley** (0) 1 Adeyemo 86 — 6,720

Charlton (0) 1 Berry 90+2 — **Leyton Orient** (0) 0 — 15,126

Huddersfield (1) 2 Koroma 26, Wiles 53 — **Stevenage** (0) 1 White 90+5pen — 18,529

Lincoln City (0) 1 House 70 — **Barnsley** (1) 2 Cosgrove 13, Roberts 47 — 9,768

Mansfield (2) 3 Evans 4, Armer 45+1og, Gregory 90+7pen — **Burton** (1) 3 Bodin 7 81, Whitfield 69 — 7,781

Northampton (0) 2 Morton 65, McGeehan 77 — **Exeter** (1) 1 Crama 8 — 5,981

Reading (1) 2 Savage 7, Ehibhatiomhan 57 — **Wigan** (0) 0 — 12,689

Rotherham (0) 0 — **Bristol Rovers** (0) 0 — 9,414

Shrewsbury (1) 1 Winchester 21 — **Peterborough Utd** (1) 4 Poku 23 58, Randall 87 88 — 6,015

Wycombe (1) 2 Bielik 22og, Vokes 90 — **Birmingham** (1) 3 May 31, Harris 68, Willumsson 82 — 6,224

Sky Bet League Two

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Walsall	2	2	0	0	5	0	+5	6
Gillingham	2	2	0	0	5	1	+4	6
Bromley	2	2	0	0	4	0	+4	6
Chesterfield	2	1	1	0	6	1	+5	4
Port Vale	2	1	1	0	2	0	+2	4
Fleetwood	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
Bradford City	2	1	1	0	2	1	+1	4
Newport County	2	1	0	1	5	4	+1	3
Doncaster	2	1	0	1	5	4	+1	3
Cheltenham	2	1	0	1	5	5	0	3
Colchester	2	1	0	1	4	4	0	3
AFC Wimbledon	2	1	0	1	4	4	0	3
Grimsby	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
Barrow	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Carlisle	2	1	0	1	2	4	-2	3
Notts County	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2
Tranmere	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Harrogate	2	0	1	1	3	5	-2	1
Salford City	2	0	1	1	0	2	-2	1
Accrington Stanley	2	0	1	1	4	7	-3	1
Swindon	2	0	1	1	1	5	-4	1
Morecambe	2	0	0	2	0	2	-2	0
MK Dons	2	0	0	2	1	4	-3	0
Crewe	2	0	0	2	0	6	-6	0

Accrington Stanley (1) 3 Walton 29, Knowles 60, Mooney 62 — **Harrogate** (2) 3 Daly 16, Taylor 33, Folarin 90+3 — 1,905

Bradford City (0) 0 — **Salford City** (0) 0 — 16,183

Bromley (1) 2 Cheek 35, Whitely 60 — **AFC Wimbledon** (0) 0

Carlisle (1) 1 Adu-Adjei 35 — **Barrow** (0) 0 — 9,813

Colchester (0) 2 Read 81, Payne 90+4 — **MK Dons** (0) 0 — 4,521

Crewe (0) 0 — **Chesterfield** (4) 5 Berry-McNally 1 12, Grigg 11, Naylor 28, Dobra 49 — 5,626

Grimsby (1) 3 Davies 44 90+3, Vernam 51 — **Cheltenham** (0) 2 Young 61, Taylor 82 — 5,885

Morecambe (0) 0 — **Gillingham** (0) 1 Lapslie 76 — 3,611

Newport County (0) 3 Baker-Richardson 47, Whitmore 66, Baker 69 — **Doncaster** (1) 1 Bailey 30 — 4,755

Notts County (0) 2 Jatta 57, Jones 90+5pen — **Fleetwood** (1) 2 Graydon 30, Wiredu 46 — 1,056

Port Vale (0) 0 — **Tranmere** (0) 0 — 8,102

Swindon (0) 0 — **Walsall** (2) 4 Gordon 33, Matt 41, Allen 49, Adomah 64 — 7,786

Non-league

VANARAMA NATIONAL LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Gateshead	2	2	0	0	7	1	+6	6
Eastleigh	2	2	0	0	6	2	+4	6
Oldham	2	2	0	0	4	0	+4	6
Sutton Utd	2	1	1	0	6	1	+5	4
Forest Green	2	1	1	0	7	3	+4	4
Rochdale	2	1	1	0	4	1	+3	4
York	2	1	1	0	3	1	+2	4
Aldershot	2	1	1	0	4	3	+1	4
Dagenham & Red	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
Hartlepool	2	1	1	0	1	0	+1	4
Solihull	2	1	0	1	4	4	0	3
Barnet	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
Halifax	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Yeovil	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Fylde	2	1	0	1	5	6	-1	3
Altrincham	2	1	0	1	1	5	-4	3
Southend	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
Tamworth	2	0	1	1	1	3	-2	1
Wealdstone	2	0	0	2	1	3	-2	0
Maidenhead	2	0	0	2	1	4	-3	0
Woking	2	0	0	2	0	3	-3	0
Braintree	2	0	0	2	0	4	-4	0
Ebbsfleet	2	0	0	2	2	7	-5	0
Boston	2	0	0	2	0	7	-7	0

Boston 0 Forest Green 4; Braintree 0 Yeovil 1; Eastleigh 4 Fylde 2; Ebbsfleet 1 Barnet 2; Halifax 0 Aldershot 1; Hartlepool 0 Southend 0; Rochdale 1 Dagenham & Red 1; Solihull 2 Maidenhead 1; Sutton 5 Altrincham 0; Wealdstone 0 Oldham 1; Woking 0 Gateshead 2; York 2 Tamworth 0

VANARAMA NATIONAL LEAGUE NORTH

(top 10)	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Scunthorpe	2	2	0	0	6	0	+6	6
Curzon Ashton	2	2	0	0	5	1	+4	6
Kidderminster	2	2	0	0	5	1	+4	6
Southport	2	2	0	0	5	2	+3	6
Buxton	2	2	0	0	4	2	+2	6
Scarborough	2	1	1	0	6	3	+3	4
Hereford	2	1	1	0	4	1	+3	4
Chorley	2	1	1	0	2	1	+1	4
Alfreton	2	1	0	1	4	3	+1	3
Leamington	2	1	0	1	4	3	+1	3

Alfreton 3 King's Lynn 0; Buxton 2 Farsley 1; Chester 0 Brackley 1; Chorley 1 Hereford 1; Kidderminster 3 Radcliffe 0; Leamington 3 Spennymoor 1; Needham M'ket 1 Southport 2; Oxford C 2 Darlington 2; Scarboro' 3 Rushall 0; Scunthorpe 3 Marine 0; S Shields 1 Curzon Ash 2; War'ton 1 Peterboro' Sp 0

VANARAMA NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH

(top 10)	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Boreham Wood	2	2	0	0	3	1	+2	6
Dorking	2	2	0	0	3	1	+2	6
Farnborough	2	2	0	0	3	1	+2	6
Hemel Hempstead	2	1	1	0	4	2	+2	4
Worthing	2	1	1	0	6	5	+1	4
Tonbridge	2	1	1	0	5	4	+1	4
Salisbury	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
Eastbourne	2	1	1	0	2	1	+1	4
Hornchurch	2	1	0	1	3	2	+1	3
Truro	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3

Aveley 2 Tonbridge 2; Bath 1 Welling 0; Chelmsford 1 Hampton & R 1; Chesham 1 Boreham Wood 2; Dorking 1 Chippenham 0; Enfield 1 Weston-s-Mare 0; Farnborough 1 Torquay 0; Hornchurch 0 Eastbourne 1; Maidstone 1 Truro 2; Salisbury 1 Slough 0; St Albans 2 Worthing 2; Weymouth 0 Hemel Hempstead 2

Other results

Rugby union

RUGBY CHAMPIONSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PD	Pts
South Africa	2	2	0	0	63	19	+44	10
New Zealand	2	1	0	1	72	48	+24	5
Argentina	2	1	0	1	48	72	-24	4
Australia	2	0	0	2	19	63	-44	0

Australia 12 South Africa 30; New Zealand 42 Argentina 10

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PD	Pts
Hull KR	22	17	0	5	575	268	+307	34
Wigan	22	17	0	5	549	296	+253	34
Warrington	22	16	0	6	564	295	+269	32
St Helens	22	13	0	9	518	298	+220	26
Catalan	22	13	0	9	402	344	+58	26
Salford	22	13	0	9	393	425	-32	26
Leigh	22	11	1	10	466	326	+140	23
Leeds	22	11	0	11	407	392	+15	22
Huddersfield	22	8	0	14	392	490	-98	16
Castleford	22	6	1	15	354	579	-225	13
Hull FC	22	3	0	19	290	683	-393	6
London Broncos	22	3	0	19	261	775	-514	6

Catalan 4 Hull KR 36; Huddersfield 20 Castleford 12; Hull FC 4 London Broncos 29; Leigh 26 Salford 0; Warrington 24 Leeds 6; Wigan 20 St Helens 0;

BETFRED CHAMPIONSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PD	Pts
Wakefield	20	19	0	1	704	240	+464	38
Toulouse	20	13	1	6	584	280	+304	27
Sheffield	20	13	0	7	530	369	+161	26
Bradford	20	11	2	7	504	343	+161	24
Widnes	20	11	1	8	446	363	+83	23
Featherstone	20	11	0	9	494	396	+98	22
York	20	10	0	10	520	411	+109	20
Batley	20	10	0	10	350	410	-60	20
Doncaster	20	9	1	10	382	478	-96	19
Halifax	20	8	0	12	400	509	-109	16
Barrow	20	7	1	12	338	582	-244	15
Swinton	20	7	0	13	372	502	-130	14
Whitehaven	20	6	2	12	376	662	-286	14
Dewsbury	20	1	0	19	272	727	-455	2

Bradford 21 Featherstone 22; Dewsbury 24 Barrow 31; Swinton 20 Halifax 6; Toulouse 12 York 20; Wakefield 36 Widnes 12; Whitehaven 28 Doncaster 24.
Friday Sheffield 14 Batley 24

BETFRED LEAGUE ONE

Cornwall 6 Midlands 18; Hunslet 28 North Wales 20; Keighley 12 Oldham 20; Newcastle 6 Rochdale 78

Cricket

SECOND TEST (third day of five)

Providence South Africa 160 (S Joseph 5-33) & 246 (K Verreynne 59; AK Makram 51; JNT Seales 6-61). West Indies 144 (JO Holder 54no; PWA Mulder 4-32) and 222. South Africa beat West Indies by 40 runs.

SECOND WOMEN'S ONE-DAY INTERNATIONAL

Belfast Ireland 255-5 (L Paul 81; A Hunter 66; R Stokell 53). Sri Lanka 240 (HMD Samarawickrama 105; WK Dilhari 53). Ireland beat Sri Lanka by 15 runs.

METRO BANK ONE-DAY CUP

Semi-finals Taunton Somerset 334-4 (LP Goldsworthy 115; JEK Rew 71; ARI Umeed 57). Leicestershire 311-9 (PSP Handscomb 111). Somerset beat Leicestershire by 23 runs.

Cardiff Glamorgan 247-9 (DA Douthwaite 55; EG Barnard 4-34). Warwickshire 208 (MGK Burgess 85). Glamorgan beat Warwickshire by 39 runs.

THE HUNDRED WOMEN

Eliminator The Oval Oval Invincibles 113-9. London Spirit 116-2 (GP Redmayne 53no). London Spirit beat Oval Invicibles by eight wickets.

Final Lord's Welsh Fire 115-8 (JL Jonassen 54). London Spirit 118-6. London Spirit beat Welsh Fire by four wickets.

THE HUNDRED MEN

Eliminator The Oval Southern Brave 126-6. Birmingham Phoenix 126-7 (LS Livingstone 55). Match tied; Southern Brave won the Super Five 11-7

Final Lord's Oval Invincibles 147-9. Southern Brave 130-7. Oval Invincibles beat Southern Brave by 17 runs.

Golf

ST JUDE CHAMPIONSHIP (Memphis, Tennessee)

Leading final scores (US unless stated) **263** H Matsuyama (Jpn) 65 64 64 70. **265** V Hovland (Nor) 70 63 66 66; X Schauffele 66 69 67 63. **266** S Scheffler 66 65 69 66. **267** S Burns 67 63 70 67; N Dunlap 67 65 66 69. **268** W Clark 68 69 67 64; R MacIntyre (Sco) 67 66 70 65. **269** D McCarthy 66 63 72 68. **270** B Horschel 68 65 70 67; S Power (Ire) 67 70 66 67. **271** A Bhatia 69 68 66 68; P Cantlay 72 67 66 66; M McNealy 70 68 69 64; W Zalatoris 69 65 67 70.

D+D REAL CZECH MASTERS (Prague)

Leading final scores (GB/Ire unless stated): **265** D Ravetto (Fr) 68 63 70 64. **269** J Svensson (Swe) 65 67 68 69. **270** R Ramsay 65 67 71 67; A Saddier (Fr) 66 69 67 68; F Lacroix (Fr) 68 70 67 65. **272** A Fitzpatrick 70 70 65 67; P Waring 68 69 68 67; B Wiesberger (Aut) 67 67 71 67; B Thompson 65 68 69 70. **273** D van Driel (Neth) 68 68 69 68; R Mansell 69 66 69 69.

WOMEN'S SCOTTISH OPEN (Ayrshire)

Leading final scores (GB/Ire unless stated): **273** L Coughlin (US) 69 69 66 69. **277** E Henseleit (Ger) 70 71 66 70. **279** A Furue (Jpn) 69 73 69 68; M Khang (US) 68 68 69 74. **280** C Hull 70 68 69 73. **281** G Ruffels (Aus) 71 73 69 68; J Ko (Kor) 71 71 68 71. **282** S Schmelzel (US) 71 72 69 70. **283** L Ko (NZ) 69 69 71 74. **285** N Iturrioz (Sp) 72 74 66 73; L Pettersson (Swe) 71 72 68 74.

Tennis

ATP WINSTON-SALEM OPEN (North Carolina, US)

First round: A Vukic (Aus) bt D Evans (GB) 2-6 6-4 6-1; **B Coric** (Cro) bt S Nagal (Ind) 6-4 6-2.

ATP/WTA CINCINNATI OPEN (Ohio, US)

Men: Third round: J Draper (GB) bt F Auger-Aliassime (Can) 5-7 6-4 6-4; **F Tiafoe** (US) bt J Lehecka (Cz) 6-4 6-7 (10-12) 7-6 (7-5); **H Rune** (Den) bt G Monfils (Fr) 3-6 6-3 6-4; **H Hurkacz** (Pol) bt F Cobolli (It) 6-3 3-6 6-1.
Quarter-finals: A Zverev (Ger) bt B Shelton (US) 3-6 7-6 (7-3) 7-5; **J Sinner** (It) bt A Rublev (Rus) 4-6 7-5 6-4; **H Rune** (Den) bt J Draper (GB) 6-4 6-2; **F Tiafoe** (US) bt H Hurkacz (Pol) 6-3 ret.

Women: Third round: J Pegula (US) bt T Townsend (US) 6-2 6-3; **A Pavlyuchenkova** (Rus) bt Zheng Q (Chn) 7-5 6-1; **P Badosa** (Sp) bt Y Putintseva (Kaz) 6-4 6-4; **L Fernandez** (Can) bt D Shnaider (Rus) 6-1 6-4.
Quarter-finals: I Swiatek (Pol) bt M Andreeva (Rus) 4-6 6-3 7-5; **J Pegula** (US) bt L Fernandez (Can) 7-5 6-7 (1-7) 7-6 (7-3); **A Sabalenka** (Blr) bt L Samsonova (Rus) 6-3 6-2; **P Badosa** (Sp) bt A Pavlyuchenkova (Rus) 6-3 6-2.
Semi-finals: A Sabalenka (Blr) bt I Swiatek (Po) 6-3 6-3; **J Pegula** (US) bt P Badosa (Sp) 6-2 3-6 6-3.

Cycling

VUELTA A ESPAÑA

Stage two (Cascais - Ourem, 194.0km) **1** K Groves (Aus) Alpecin-Deceuninck 5hr 12min 55sec; **2** W Van Aert (Bel) Visma Lease A Bike; **3** C Strong (Aus) Premier Tech; **4** P Miquel Delgado (Sp) Equipo Kern Pharma; **5** L Van Eetvelt (Bel) Lotto Dstny all s/t.
General classification: 1 W Van Aert (Bel) Visma Lease A Bike 5hr 25min 27sec; **2** B McNulty (US) Team Emirates +0:03; **3** M Vacek (Cz) Lidl-Trek +0:05; **4** S Kung (Swi) Groupama-FDJ +0:09; **5** E Affini (It) Visma Lease A Bike +0:11.

TOUR DE FRANCE FEMMES

Stage seven (Champagnole-Le Grand-Bornand, 167km): **1** J Ghekiere (Bel) AG Insurance-Soudal 4hr 26min 58sec; **2** M Squiban (Fr) Arkea Pro Cycling +1:15; **3** D Vollering (Neth) SD Worx 1:23; **4** K Niewadoma (Pol) Canyon/SRAM Racing +1:23; **5** E Muzic (Fr) FDJ-Suez +1:27.
Stage eight (Le Grand-Bornand-Alpe d'Huez, 149.9km): **1** D Vollering (Neth) SD Worx-Protime 4hr 34min 14sec; **2** P Rooijakkers (Neth) Fenix-Deceuninck +0:04; **3** E Muzin (Fr) FDJ-Suez +1:01; **4** K Niewiadoma (Pol) Canyon/SRAM Racing at same time; **5** G Realini (It) Lidl-Trek +1:31.
Final general classification: 1 K Niewiadoma (Pol) Canyon/SRAM Racing 24hr 36min 07sec; **2** D Vollering (Neth) SD Worx-Protime +0:04; **3** P Rooijakkers (Neth) Fenix-Deceuninck +0:10; **4** E Muzic (Fr) FDJ-Suez +1:21; **5** G Realini (It) Lidl-Trek +2:19.

Darts

NEW ZEALAND MASTERS (Hamilton)

Quarter-finals: L Littler (Eng) bt D van den Bergh (Bel) 6-4; **L Humphries** (Eng) bt M Smith (Eng) 6-4; **P Wright** (Sco) bt G Price (Wal) 6-4; **D Heta** (Aus) bt R Cross (Eng) 6-5 .
Semi-finals: L Humphries (Eng) bt L Littler (Eng) 7-6; **D Heta** (Aus) bt P Wright (Sco) 7-4.
Final: L Humphries (Eng) bt D Heta (Aus) 8-2.

Greg Wood's racing tips

Catterick **2.15** She's A Novelty **2.45** Cashlyn Cavalier **3.15** La La Lucrative **3.45** L'Eagle Aid **4.15** Glory Fighter **4.45** Bulmer Bank

Worcester **2.30** Stroll On By **3.00** Crypto Currency **3.30** Remember Moi **4.00** Flying Fortune **4.30** Galata Bridge **5.00** School Days Over

Yarmouth **5.10** Kracking **5.40** Back In Black **6.10** Frinton **6.40** Aim For The Moon **7.10** Fletcher's Flight **7.40** Medician Star

Windsor **5.25** Party Island **5.55** Piranha Rama **6.25** Didaar **6.55** Tremblant (nap) **7.25** Exceed (nb) **7.55** Firenze Rosa

Tennis

Djokovic wants video replays after Draper controversy

Dominic Booth

Novak Djokovic has called for the introduction of video reviews in tennis after the bizarre conclusion to Jack Draper's match at the Cincinnati Open prompted a wider debate about the use of replays in the sport.

Draper, the British No 1, defeated Félix Auger-Aliassime of Canada 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 to reach the quarter-finals but the match ended in a heated argument with an angry Auger-Aliassime claiming to officials that Draper's winning volley had gone into the ground first. The umpire, Greg Allensworth, was unable to view a replay and called the point in Draper's favour.

The supervisor was called on to court but had no grounds to overturn the decision with replays unavailable and Draper insisting he had not seen what happened and unwilling to replay the point. "It's going to go everywhere and it's going to look ridiculous," the Canadian told the umpire.

The two-time grand slam finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas reposted a video of the point on X, adding: "I don't think I have ever seen a shot like this."

Responding to that post, Djokovic called for the use of regular video reviews. "It's embarrassing that we don't have video replay of these kind of situations on the court," he wrote. "What's even more ridiculous is that we don't have the rule in place that would allow chair umpires to change the original call based on the video review that happens off the court!

"Everyone who watches TV sees what happened on the replay, yet the players on the court are kept in [the] 'dark' not knowing what's the outcome. We have Hawk-Eye for line calls, we live in the technologically advanced 21st century! Please respective Tours, make sure this nonsense never happens again!"

Draper's run at the Cincinnati Open ended yesterday in a 4-6, 2-6 defeat by Holger Rune in the quarter-finals. A tight first set was decided on its only break point, before Rune broke the Briton again at the start of the second set and saved three break points on his own serve to complete the win. Rune will play Frances Tiafoe next. Jannik Sinner will face Alexander Zverev in the other semi-final.



Greg Allensworth was unable to view a replay of the incident

Invincibles defend crown after Mahmood's timely intervention

Oval Invincibles 147-9

Southern Brave 130-7

Oval Invincibles beat Southern Brave by 17 runs

Taha Hashim
Lord's

Lord's is a place of joy for Oval Invincibles once again. Saqib Mahmood was the chief menace, taking three wickets and conceding just a single in the space of seven consecutive deliveries to set up a 17-run victory over Southern Brave, back-to-back titles secured for the men's side.

The game was Brave's under lights at HQ, close to 29,000 watching, chasing a tough ask of 148 but well-settled at 95 for three, 30 balls still left to play with. Leus du Plooy and Laurie Evans' partnership was growing as Mahmood returned to the attack, his captain, Sam Billings, needing something, anything. Please.

Du Plooy found four immediately but a shuffle to the leg-side for an off-side hit then proved costly. Mahmood, an international-class quick whose recent years have been riddled with back stress fractures, found leg stump – with reverse swing.

"Somebody had got hit for six and there was a little bit of a scuff on the ball," Mahmood later revealed.


Brothers Tom and Sam Curran celebrate Hundred success

Out came Kieron Pollard, a king of the shortest form but now in the later stages of a storied career. The ball danced, three dots leaving Pollard shotless.

That was the end of Mahmood's set but Billings wanted more; the bowler continued for another five, pinning Pollard's pads for his second before forcing Evans to chip to Dawid Malan at cover and leave the Brave reeling at 100 for six.

Twenty-two balls remained but Mahmood had won the game and the tournament, too, his final figures three for 17.

"When we got together as a group, a lot of the talk was [about] when the boys won it last year," said Mahmood, who had not played in the Hundred since 2021 due to his injuries. "I've been part of the Oval Invincibles every year but I haven't played the last two years so I wanted to feel that for myself as well."

And what next for a bowler with slinging pace, reverse swing and a promising international record? Lancashire is the focus for the rest of the season "but, yeah, one eye on that England series against Australia as well".

The Brave had arrived to the final after a late resurrection in Saturday's Eliminator at the Oval, a straightforward victory over Birmingham Phoenix turning into a tie before a super over/set/five to settle it. Jofra Archer's fuller-length grenades won the argument.

Yesterday, after Brave chose to bowl first, Archer was greeted by a Will Jacks thump over the off-side for six, a shot to awaken something more ferocious within the fast bowler; a bouncer followed, a blow to the forearm not long after.

But the right-hander wasn't to be disturbed by the examination, firing a six over Craig Overton's head before feasting upon Akeal Hosein for more, the 16 taken off the left-arm spinner's first set including a drop from Pollard at long-on. Jacks, on 33 off 15, was on.

But after the departure of Malan for seven, Jacks' own stay was ended by Tymal Mills for 37 before a period of consolidation with a 46-run stand between Jordan Cox and the tournament MVP, Sam Curran.

Curran's dismissal for 25, leaving the Invincibles 93 for three, prompted a collapse, the instigator Hosein. A nerveless operator, he had Billings bowled, Donovan Ferreira lobbing up a grab for Pollard. Mills bounced out Cox to make it 102 for six with 24 balls left in the innings. The Brave had control.

Once again, Tom Curran came to the rescue. Sam's elder brother had saved his side in last year's final after losing five early wickets, slapping an unbeaten 67 off 34 balls against Manchester Originals. This time the contribution was 24 off 11, including a hop across the crease to lift Archer over extra cover and into the crowd. "If one Curran doesn't get ya, the other one will," said Billings.

James Vince, the tournament's leading run-scorer by a fair whack, opened up with Alex Davies, who walked in with back-to-back ducks behind him. It was the latter who dominated their stand with a quickfire 35, enjoying the early looseness of the quicks before back-to-back boundaries off Nathan Sowter's leg-spin.

But 58 for none was soon 66 for three, the Invincibles attacking with spin. Adam Zampa went through Davies and Jacks lit up Vince's stumps. Sowter joined in on the fun with the dismissal of James Coles. The push-and-pull continued, Du Plooy and Evans setting things up for the climax. Mahmood's pace would win it.



◀ *Southern Brave's first wicket falls as Alex Davies is bowled for 35*
ALEX DAVIDSON/ECB/GETTY IMAGES



Sharma turns into a hero – to the delight of Dean this time

Welsh Fire 115-8

London Spirit 118-6

London Spirit beat Welsh Fire by four wickets

Raf Nicholson
Lord's

London Spirit won a nerve-shredding Women's Hundred final against Welsh Fire, chasing down their target of 116 with just two balls to spare.

The match set an attendance record for a women's game at Lord's, with 22,000 spectators treated to a thriller in which Spirit limped across the line, breaking Welsh hearts.

For the home crowd, the match also spawned an unlikely hero: two years ago Deepti Sharma was booed off the field playing for India after Mankading England's Charlie Dean, but on this occasion – with Dean once again at the non-striker's end – Sharma was roundly cheered as she lofted the winning runs for six over long-on.

The Spirit captain, Heather Knight, said she was delighted with the victory, which brought back memories of her triumph at the same venue with England in the 2017 World Cup final. "It was a bit of a scrappy one, but we've committed to how we want to play, we've talked about being really positive and taking the game on," she said.

The Fire coach, Gareth Breese, described the match as "a fantastic

Spirit put out Fire for record crowd



Heather Knight lifts the trophy after London Spirit's tense Hundred triumph with two balls left
ALEX DAVIDSON/ECB/GETTY IMAGES

game of cricket", saying: "There's definitely pride, but there's also a lot of hurt, because we play to win. We did the game proud today."

It should have been an easy chase for Spirit but the South African "pocket rocket" Shabnim Ismail intervened on three occasions, reaching speeds of 77mph and angling in the ball to take out the stumps of Meg Lanning, Knight and Dani Gibson.

Georgia Redmayne, whose 34 runs secured her a second match hero award in two days after her clinching innings in the eliminator, was then trapped lbw by the ever reliable Freya Davies, with 12 still needed from the final 11 balls.

The run-out of Abbey Freeborn left the equation six from the last set of five - but Deepti's big swing finished the match in one hit. "She's been unbelievable with bat and ball - her clarity and calmness, and her willingness to take the game on," Knight said.

Knight was also full of praise for Gibson, the 23-year-old England all-rounder who dropped two catches and was smashed for 38 runs by Oval Invincibles on Saturday, but yesterday at Lord's pulled out an innings of 22 from nine balls of which the England head coach, Jon Lewis - he of the "inspire and entertain" mantra - would have been proud.

"She had a tough day yesterday where it didn't go how she wanted," Knight said. "The character to go: 'I'm going to go and do what I do, I'm going to go and win this game,' is unbelievable. She really took the pressure off the rest of the batters."

Earlier, Welsh Fire found themselves 32 for three after 29 balls, and had to be bailed out of trouble by a half-century from the Australian overseas player Jess Jonassen. The all-rounder last played a T20 for Australia in October 2023 and was a shock omission from their squad to tour Bangladesh in March, but she has been a core component of Fire's success this season, with 176 runs at an average of 44.

Spirit initially turned the screw with nine dots in 10 balls from Dean, followed by two wickets in three deliveries from Sarah Glenn. Fire's captain, Tammy Beaumont, whose half-century on Wednesday launched her side into the top spot in the table, prodded the softest of catches to mid-off, before Sarah Bryce was trapped lbw for a two-ball duck.

Deepti Sharma and Charlie Dean celebrate victory

Hayley Matthews, who has been Fire's leading run-scorer in the tournament, joined Jonassen for a 52-run partnership; but on this occasion her slow start ate up crucial balls, and she eventually edged Eva Gray behind off the 75th ball of the innings.

Gray also had Jonassen pinned lbw off the penultimate ball of the innings, but not before the left-hander had repeatedly driven through the covers to elevate Fire's score over 100.

In reply, Fire took the early wicket of Lanning - who with an average of 17 across 10 innings in the competition has perhaps not quite lived up to her Megastar moniker - bowled by Ismail after swiping wildly across the line.

The pinch-hitter Cordelia Griffith was also dismissed early, edging behind when attempting a drive. But Gibson's five boundaries kept things moving, while Knight - who has struggled to make an impact with the bat in previous seasons of the Hundred - chipped in with 24 from 18 balls to finish with a tally of 271: the second highest run-scorer in the competition.

"I haven't dominated a Hundred competition before - I was desperate to do well this year. I was really pleased to contribute. I wanted to show the form I'm in ahead of the World Cup," she said.

Rugby League *Magic Weekend*

Elland Road showpiece falls flat but bottom line offers hope

Aaron Bower
Elland Road

So, that was the 2024 Magic Weekend. Compelling on the field without doubt, with some intriguing results that sets things up for the final five rounds of the Super League season and means that nothing, in any part of the table, can be predicted with a degree of confidence.

But the event itself? Well, there are some questions to be asked. Magic Weekend has been one of Super League's great concepts since it first arrived on the scene in 2007: if the NRL effectively pinches your idea, you know you are on to something good. This year, however, we appear to have reached a line-in-the-sand moment for the event.

The move to Elland Road was, all things being equal, never likely to hit the sweet spot. With the spiritual home of Newcastle and St James' Park unavailable, Leeds was the only real option available to host Magic Weekend in 2024. It was a decision which had an air of malaise about it, largely because relocating Magic to the sport's heartlands made little sense on the face of it.

In the end, the final number on the attendance figure emphasised the disappointment. The second-lowest combined attendance for Magic Weekend in its 17-year history - 53,103 - suggests Elland Road has not been a success. Or has it? What does Super League want from its flagship event from 2025 onwards?

Leeds has clearly failed to whet the appetite of the public, but the event being relocated closer to home has led to it making a profit: albeit not a life-changing one. They would never admit this publicly but if there is one thing that motivates club owners more than anything, it is money on the bottom line.

Supporter mood? That is great: but it does not pay the bills. If Magic Weekend has indeed turned a profit in Leeds, it will at least pique the interest of some at boardroom level - even if the view from the terraces is undeniably clear.

Do we want a profit-making exercise, or do we want what Magic Weekend was originally intended for: an annual weekend roadshow of the great and good of Super League in a high-calibre, fresh venue that can attract new eyes and ears. Modest profit and malaise, or excitement with the potential - but certainly not a guarantee - of a loss? It's the decision the sport faces. Risk versus reward.

If not Leeds, where next? The options are plentiful, it seems. Rhodri Jones, managing director of Rugby League Commercial, has insinuated they will look outside the heartlands for 2025. That includes a potential return to Newcastle, but also Nottingham's City Ground, Dublin and Cardiff are in the mix. All of those options come with risk: but more important, they come with excitement.

And really, is that not what Magic Weekend is supposed to be about? What has happened on the field this weekend has been compelling. Hull KR's quest for a first major trophy since 1985 continued with a wonderful 36-4 win against Catalans Dragons to remain top of the table. London Broncos reignited the battle to avoid finishing bottom with a courageous victory against Hull FC.

Results across the weekend also injected new life into the race to make the top six, with the teams in fourth, fifth and sixth losing and Leigh, who sit just outside in seventh, reducing the gap to three points with five games left after an eye-catching 26-0 victory against Salford.

These stories, and these players, deserve a befitting backdrop. Elland Road is a wonderful venue for live sport; the World Cup semi-final between Australia and New Zealand two years ago was unforgettable. But you would consider it a fair assumption that really, it does not quite the fit the brief for Magic Weekend: unless, of course, that brief has changed behind the scenes.

Only in the months ahead, when we learn what happens next, will we know for sure. For nearly two decades, Magic Weekend has been an event that has created countless positives for rugby league. Now, with IMG in charge, it is time to decide what it wants from its flagship event and plot an even brighter future for a concept that still has its place in the game.



▲ *Hull KR's Ryan Hall bursts through to score in their win against Catalans*
ANNA GOWTHORPE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Tour de France Femmes

Niewiadoma wins title by four seconds in frantic finale

Pole holds off Vollering with narrowest margin in history of men's or women's event

Jeremy Whittle
Alpe d'Huez

Kasia Niewiadoma won the 2024 women's Tour de France by four seconds, the narrowest margin in the history of either the women's or men's race, clinging on to the yellow jersey, despite an Alpine assault from the defending champion, Demi Vollering.

On Saturday afternoon, a defiant Niewiadoma had said: "I lost four seconds, so that's nothing," after Vollering had picked up that much via time bonus. Twenty-four hours later, though, for the Pole and her Canyon-SRAM team, four precious seconds at the top of Alpe d'Huez meant everything.

"Four seconds seem to be magical now," she said. "Throughout my whole career there were so many times I missed out on victories. I feel like this week was perfect for me and my team. To be able to win big races, you need everything on your side."

The 29-year-old had earlier described the final stage of the Femmes as "the most important day of my career and maybe, my team's existence". Her tearful disbelief, at sealing overall victory by such a slim margin, bore that out.

In a nail-biting drama that came to a head on the 21 hairpins of the steep climb, Niewiadoma fought off all her main rivals, during a stage in which, at one point, all had seemed lost for her.

> **'To be able to win big races, you need everything on your side'**
>
> **Kasia Niewiadoma**
> *Overall champion*

As the leaders began the climb to the ski station, five riders were in play for final victory. Niewiadoma, lacking any teammates, was under intense pressure with the top three on the general classification separated by just 10 seconds, as they closed on the finish.

Vollering's initial make-or-break attack had come on the Col du Glandon, the penultimate climb, 55km from the finish. The SD Worx Protime rider made her move 3km from the summit, with Niewiadoma unable to respond.

As mountain mist swirled around the peloton, so it seemed to close in on the Pole's hopes of overall victory. Niewiadoma chased hard over the top of the Glandon, while Vollering rode clear and made up her overnight deficit of 1min 15sec to the race lead on the long descent to the valley road at Allemond. But in the ensuing kilometres, tactical complications and conflicting objectives worked against Vollering. As she has, for much of the race, the 2023 champion did most of the hard work on her own.

Aside from a virtuoso turn by Niamh Fisher-Black in the final kilometres of the Glandon, she had to make the difference herself, even on the flat road leading to the Alpe, when her Dutch compatriot Pauliena Rooijakkers, also a contender for final victory, refused to collaborate.

Vollering got so frustrated that, after remonstrating with Rooijakkers, she pushed the Fenix-Deceuninck rider on the shoulder. Her anger had little effect and by the bottom of the Alpe, her lead on Niewiadoma had dwindled to only 44sec.

On the 21 hairpins, a classic pursuit took shape: Vollering and Rooijakkers were chased by Niewiadoma, the Italian climber Gaia Realini of Lidl-Trek and France's Évita Muzic, riding for FDJ-Suez. All five harboured hopes of a top-three finish.



Polish rider lifts herself to the top

Kasia Niewiadoma raises her bike in victory after keeping hold of the yellow jersey on the final stage ALEX BROADWAY/ GETTY IMAGES

Vollering's relentless pace clawed back more time and, with 10km still to race, overall victory was in view. But the tables turned once more when the defending champion began to falter, with 3km remaining. It was just enough to end her hopes.

Vollering could point to a series of mishaps: her sometimes erratic team support, the dramatic crash at Amnéville in which she lost her race lead, and the lack of support during her attack to the Alpe. "I'm a bit disappointed that I couldn't win the yellow jersey, just by four seconds," she said. "That's a bit sour for me."

In the end, the destiny of the closest Tour in its history was played out in the final few metres of a race that was 950km long. Vollering rallied to take a prestigious stage win, but the resilient Niewiadoma chased once more, crossing the line in tears, as she realised she had held on to win.

"Hopefully this will attract more ladies to hop on the bike," a beaming Niewiadoma said. "It feels amazing to be at the top step, to be rewarded for all the hard work. We're very proud to be at the top."

Vuelta a España

Van Aert and Groves prosper while Tarling escapes crash

Trevor Stynes

The Australian rider Kaden Groves sprinted to victory in the second stage of the Vuelta a España as Wout van Aert pulled on the overall leader's red jersey.

Groves, of the Alpecin-Deceuninck team, held off Van Aert (Visma-Lease a Bike) in a hectic finish to a relatively sedate 194km ride inland to the north from the Portuguese coastal town of Cascais to Ourém. The New Zealander Corbin Strong (Israel Premier Tech) came home third.

Van Aert was left frustrated at not winning a stage for the second successive day, after coming third in the opening time trial on Saturday, but the Belgian took the red jersey by virtue of six bonus seconds.

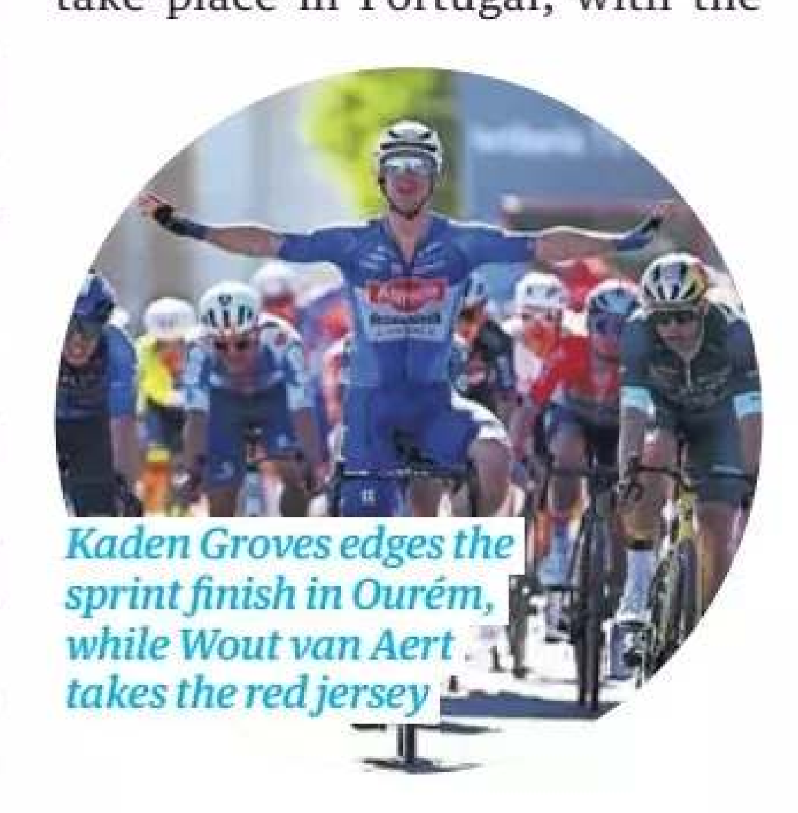
"Of course, I wanted to win this stage, my team did a really good job to make it a bunch sprint so it's unfortunate to arrive second, but today I knew that finishing in the first three meant the red jersey, so after all it's a good day," Van Aert said.

Several riders were involved in a crash inside the last 4km with the British rider Josh Tarling of Ineos Grenadiers lucky to avoid serious injury as he crashed into a wall. All of them managed to reach the finish line and did not lose time.

The race became animated on the descent of a late climb with riders topping 80km/h as they hurtled towards the finish. In the bunch sprint, Van Aert made the first move but Groves timed his effort superbly to take the win. It was the Australian's fifth career stage win at the Vuelta.

"It's a really nice way to start this Vuelta," Groves said. "It's been a hard year for myself, not having a win yet, but I came here super-motivated to change that, and I've got to thank my team for a really strong ride today."

Stage three today is the last to take place in Portugal, with the course taking the riders from Lousã to Castelo Branco.



Kaden Groves edges the sprint finish in Ourém, while Wout van Aert takes the red jersey

Jonas Vingegaard, meanwhile, won the Tour of Poland in a triumphant return to the race where it all started for the two-time Tour de France champion. The Danish rider decided against racing in the Vuelta a España after an exhausting Tour de France where he finished second having spent three months out of action following a crash at the Tour of the Basque Country in April.

Instead, he returned to Poland, the scene of his first UCI World Tour win in 2019, when he triumphed on stage six. While he did not win a stage this time, he claimed the overall race win. "Everything went according to plan," he said. "Now I need a rest and then think about the future." **Reuters**

Championship

Mayenda doubles up to seal easy Sunderland win

Sunderland 4
Cirkin 11, Mayenda 15 47, O'Nien 24

Sheffield Wednesday 0

The Sunderland head coach, Régis Le Bris, hailed the striker Eliezer Mayenda after the teenager scored his first goals for the club in an emphatic win over Sheffield Wednesday.

Mayenda joined from Sochaux last summer but struggled to make an impact in his first season and was sent on loan to Hibernian in February. The Black Cats are pushing to sign at least one striker before the transfer deadline at the end of this month but Mayenda has started the first two league games and Le Bris's faith was justified as the 19-year-old hit two against the Owls, who had won their opener 4-0 at home to Plymouth.

"It's really a good example for all the team," said the head coach. "He wasn't a starter last season but he still wants to improve. He has many qualities but he is still young, every day during the training session and after the games he played, he wanted to find the little details he can improve on. Today was the reward for him.

"I think there are two positions on the pitch where it is heavy to play, in goal and No 9, because the pressure, the expectation, is very high. For a young boy like Eliezer, today was for sure a great experience. We also know that we need to repeat and this is the most difficult thing as a No 9 and for other positions on the pitch.

"I'm happy for him because he works hard, he's very clear in the part of the games that he needs to improve. He's always sharing ideas with the coaches and his teammates and in the end he improves. This is a good example for all the team."

Mayenda scored Sunderland's second after Dennis Cirkin had headed the Black Cats into an 11th-minute lead. Luke O'Nien then added a third on 24 minutes before Mayenda rounded off the scoring in the early stages of the second half.

The win moved Sunderland joint top of the Championship with Burnley and Watford but Sheffield Wednesday tasted defeat for the first time this season.

The visiting manager, Danny Röhl, whose side secured safety when they won at the Stadium of Light on the final day of last season, said: "We came here with a lot of deserved confidence and belief but I said after the last game against Plymouth, it's Championship football and Championship football is about delivering game by game - after one win, one more, then three and four more.

"It's about working hard and today we came back to reality. Last time here we had a good feeling, today it feels really bad but I believe in this process. We will have games like this, now it's about the reaction." **PA Media**



◀ *Eliezer Mayenda finds himself free in the middle to extend Sunderland's lead to four in the second half*
IAN HORROCKS/ SUNDERLAND AFC/ GETTY IMAGES

Football In brief

Premier Sports League Cup

Rodgers praises Maeda as Celtic reach last eight

The Celtic manager, Brendan Rodgers, stressed the value of Daizen Maeda's versatility after the Japan international struck twice against Hibernian as a stand-in centre-forward. Maeda started in place of the injured Kyogo Furuhashi and scored twice in the first 15 minutes as Celtic beat Hibs 3-1 to set up a quarter-final against Falkirk at Parkhead. Furuhashi was missing after his shoulder popped out at Easter Road last weekend but Rodgers appears relaxed about his depth at centre-forward. Rodgers said: "Daizen has played in the World Cup as a striker, so he should be able to play as a striker for Celtic if needed. If you look at his instinctive ones today, getting to the first post to finish and the run in behind to penetrate the space, which is what I always want from a striker." **PA Media**

Ligue 1

Greenwood goals will bring 'calm' says De Zerbi

The Marseille head coach, Roberto De Zerbi, said Mason Greenwood's two debut goals in Saturday's 5-1 win over Brest will "calm the controversies" surrounding the striker. "Mason is a player different from others, he has an extraordinary level," De Zerbi said of Greenwood, who was booed throughout the game. "I am happy he scored. It will calm the controversies that surrounded his arrival." **PA Media**



▲ *Mason Greenwood scored twice against Brest on his Marseille debut*

Serie A

Conte's Napoli start with defeat at Verona

Antonio Conte's tenure at Napoli got off to miserable opening as his side were comfortably beaten 3-0 in Verona in his first league game as head coach. After a goalless first half in which Napoli rarely threatened, the Verona debutant Dailon Livramento gave the home side the lead in the 50th minute before Dairon Mosquera, another player making his first league appearance for the club, added a second 15 minutes from time. Mosquera scored the third goal in the fourth minute of stoppage time as Napoli, who finished in 10th place last season after winning the title in 2022-23, pushed for a consolation goal. **Guardian sport**

Saturday's Premier League talking points

Arsenal 2-0 Wolves

While there were no new names in Arsenal's lineup here, the XI did contain one important summer recruit. After impressing on loan from Brentford, David Raya has made his move across London permanent and played a vital role in a victory that could otherwise have been far less comfortable. The hosts were 1-0 up when the Wolves striker Jørgen Strand Larsen headed at goal, only for the Spaniard to throw his right hand out and somehow palm the ball away. "I don't know how Raya saves it," the Wolves manager, Gary O'Neil, said. "Big goalkeepers at big sides that are chasing titles sometimes come up with magic moments that can change games, and that was a big one from David Raya." Despite being a bystander for most of the game, Raya may have earned his team two points with one pivotal intervention. **Ben Bloom**



David Raya made a key save in Arsenal's victory

Everton 0-3 Brighton

The quality of Brighton's attacking options took the game away from Everton but behind it all was the effective presence of James Milner. "An unbelievable character," Fabian Hürzeler said of the midfielder after this rout. "He's a leader, a role model in terms of preparing for every training session. On top of that he is still a great player." The 38-year-old became the first player in Premier League history to compete in 23 consecutive seasons and he showed age is just a number. The respect between Milner and his 31-year-old head coach is mutual. Milner said of Hürzeler: "The first day he comes in, the age is an issue if you don't know what he's about. But he was very clear in what he wants and you don't even think about it then. He has been brilliant since he has been here, very authoritative, and methodical." **Andy Hunter**

Ipswich 0-2 Liverpool

Ipswich, despite being a League One club two years ago, fully embrace soccer modernity. While Ed Sheeran has a minority stake, the majority of the business is owned by an investment consortium, ORG, which manages funds on behalf of a multibillion-dollar US pension pot known as the Arizona Public Safety Personnel Retirement System. In March a private equity fund, Bright Path Sports Partners, bought a 40% stake. The pastel suits and aviator shades of Stateside business were visible in the Portman Road executive boxes, a contrast to the blue-shirted fervency of the home fans. A good day was had by all, barring the result. Kieran McKenna and his players face a huge task but the ownership has the wherewithal to support them. **John Brewin**

Newcastle 1-0 Southampton

Newcastle's Fabian Schär deserved to be sent off after walking into the trap set by Southampton's Ben Brereton Díaz, but perhaps there is another reason why the Switzerland defender was so easily provoked. Schär is Eddie Howe's first-choice centre-half on the right and knows that, should Newcastle sign Crystal Palace's Marc Guéhi, he will almost certainly lose his starting place. Schär is now suspended for three games, which could lead Palace to up Guéhi's asking price by another £5m as Newcastle contemplate a fifth bid. Not that there was much wrong with the defending of Howe's 10 men who kept Russell Martin's team at bay while protecting the lead secured by Joelinton's goal. With their 3-4-3 formation suiting them well, Southampton's disappointment should be leavened by optimism. **Louise Taylor**

Nottingham Forest 1-1 Bournemouth

Bournemouth made Evanilson their club-record signing last week. The Brazil striker will probably make his debut against Newcastle on Sunday, but another arrival made an impression at Nottingham Forest. Dean Huijsen, the 19-year-old defender signed from Juventus, was assured from the moment he won his first header inside 30 seconds. The 6ft 5in centre-back coped with Chris Wood and early signs were encouraging. Bournemouth may still want a goalkeeper and a left-back this window but with Huijsen, Illia Zabarnyi and Marcos Senesi they are blessed with options in the heart of defence. **Ben Fisher**

West Ham 1-2 Aston Villa

As Jhon Durán skipped out of the London Stadium and on to the team bus, it was clear the social media storm from the summer was forgotten. When the Colombia striker entered the narrative as a substitute on the hour, he might well have been booed by Villa fans. Last month, Durán filmed himself striking West Ham's "crossed irons" gesture before the two clubs had reached an agreement over his transfer. Durán was bound to end this fixture as the hero, and he scored the winning goal 11 minutes from time. Now it seems the Villa manager, Unai Emery, wants to keep Durán, and teammates believe he will stay. "He's fully committed to his task," Amadou Onana said. "This season he's going to be a very important player for us." **Matt Dunn**

▼ *Dominic Solanke will play centre-forward at Spurs, with Son Heung-min back on the left*
KIERAN MCMANUS/TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR



Postecoglou puts faith in Solanke to spark top-four bid

Signing of striker is statement of intent and reshaped attack could make impact in Spurs' opener at Leicester tonight

Ed Aarons

Ange Postecoglou could not hide his smirk when the question came about whether his record of second-season success is about to continue in north London. "Dunno," the Tottenham manager said. "I expect what I expect all the time, mate. To do my job and see what that brings. But I would suggest that it's not by accident. We'll improve and see where that takes us."

After a summer of relative calm in comparison with his arrival before the start of last season, there was a clear sense of optimism as the straight-talking Australian, who was one of the more insightful pundits employed by ITV at Euro 2024, laid out his expectations for the new campaign in the buildup to their opening match, against Leicester tonight.

This time last year, amid the emotional departure of Harry Kane to Bayern Munich, it was all about steadying the ship after the stormy reign of Antonio Conte. But with a replacement for the club's record goalscorer now secured in the form of Dominic Solanke - signed from Bournemouth for an initial club-record fee of £55m that could rise to £65m - and a fully fit squad at his disposal, it is no wonder that Postecoglou fancies Spurs' chances of improving on the fifth-place finish of last season.

While it may be stretching things to imagine they can go all the way, as Postecoglou was able to achieve in the five previous jobs where he lasted longer than 12 months, there is certainly expectation that Tottenham can sustain a serious challenge for a top-four finish. Starting with his first senior post at South Melbourne and encompassing his spells in charge of Brisbane Roar, the Australia national team - who he led to Asian Cup glory in 2015 - Yokohama Marinos and Celtic, winning league titles in Postecoglou's second season at clubs has become a habit for the 58-year-old coach. But he will know that translating that to the Premier League will be his toughest assignment yet given the competition.

Not that Tottenham can be accused of failing to spend big to back their manager: the purchase of Solanke and the teenagers Wilson Odobert, Archie Gray and Lucas Bergvall meant they have outlaid significantly more than £100m on new players after the departure of several more experienced faces such as Eric Dier and Pierre-Emile Højbjerg. But it is in Solanke, whose transfer is the Premier League's most expensive this summer, that Postecoglou has placed most faith as the 26-year-old tries to fill the shoes of Kane after scoring 19 goals for Bournemouth last season.

"My role in all signings is pretty small - I just make the decision. I'm the one that says yes or no," Postecoglou said on the influence he had on the move. "They're here because I want them here and Dom certainly fits that. I thought he did well against us [last season] and gave us some problems that a lot of other strikers in the league maybe didn't give us. His mobility and his movement was really impressive. It's no secret that we love to press and he has a great work ethic. And he can score goals. He's a presence and he scores different types of goals. I think the way we play suits him."

Perhaps more important,

Skipp on his way

The Tottenham midfielder Oliver Skipp had a medical at Leicester yesterday for a move worth more than £20m. If the transfer is completed in the next 24 hours, as expected, then Skipp will be leaving Spurs after more than 16 years. The 23-year-old joined their academy aged six but has been used sparingly in the first team with his game time limited under Ange Postecoglou. Ben Fisher

> *'My role in signings is pretty small - I just make the decision. I'm the one who says yes or no'*

Postecoglou also sees Solanke's determination to return to the highest level after starting his career at Chelsea and then moving to Liverpool as a positive.

"I really like where he was in his career," he said. "I'm a big one on understanding people and their motivations - obviously he was an outstanding young player and he went to some big clubs where it didn't work out for him. But what do you do in that scenario? Do you think: 'Well it's never going to happen for me'? Or do you try to work your way back up? He's done remarkably well to get himself back to a position where he's scored 19 goals in the Premier League last year. It's a fair feat and he's got himself back to a big club. I love that aspect because I know he's got the right kind of mentality."

Freeing Son Heung-min from the central role he struggled with last season was high among Postecoglou's priorities this summer, with the arrival of Solanke and return to fitness of Richarlison after he had surgery on a pelvic injury over the summer giving Spurs plenty of firepower.

"As much as the injuries at the back last year cost us, I still felt it was up front that we were most short and the area that we needed to improve on," said Postecoglou. "Richie when he played was outstanding but he had a lot of injuries so we had to play Sonny inside. It was Brennan [Johnson]'s first year at the club. Going into the season having Dom and Richie there with that real physical presence will be important. I think we look a much better team with Sonny out on the left. That's the exciting bit - we're looking for improvement in the final third and I think we have by bringing Dom in."

Wissa ends Brentford's long wait after Eze controversy

Brentford 2
Mbeumo 29, Wissa 76

Crystal Palace 1
Pinnock 56og

Ed Aarons
Gtech Stadium

The new season may be upon us but there had been a sense of deja vu in west London until Yoane Wissa's late winner sealed victory for Brentford against Crystal Palace for the first time in almost 50 years.

The past three editions of this fixture had all finished in a 1-1 draw and this match yesterday had seemed destined to follow suit, after Ethan Pinnock's own goal had cancelled out Bryan Mbeumo's opener in the first half and Eberechi Eze's free-kick at 0-0 was bizarrely ruled out.

However, on an afternoon when Thomas Frank had taken the bold decision of leaving Ivan Toney out of his match-day squad as the England striker attempts to engineer a move away, it was Wissa – the club's top scorer last season – who proved to be the match winner when he forced the ball home from close range 14 minutes from time.

Not since a League Cup tie in 1977 had Brentford beaten their London rivals, while you had to go back even further – to 7 September 1963 – for their last league win against Palace in the old Division Three.

Yet after a summer during which he has already lost Michael Olise to Bayern Munich as doubts grow over the future of Marc Guéhi, this under-par performance was perhaps a sign that things will not be so easy for Oliver Glasner after his spectacular start to life in south London last season.

On a warm summer's day down by the river, both managers opted for white polo shirts and trainers and were lively presences in their technical areas during a competitive first half. It took less than a minute for Guéhi – captaining Palace despite Newcastle having had multiple bids rejected for the England defender – being forced to clear Kevin Schade's dangerous cross away for a corner.

Frank said last week that his main wish for the new campaign is to have "the fewest injuries in the league" after only two players in his squad managed to make more than 30 league starts last season. But things have not got off to the best start after the club-record signing, Igor Thiago – the man who is expected to fill Toney's boots if he does depart – was ruled out until the end of the year with a knee injury, with the Brazilian watching from the stands.

Palace, who had Jean-Philippe Mateta leading the line only nine days after he lost the Olympic Games final with France, should have taken the lead when Tyrick Mitchell dragged his volley badly wide after a cross from Daniel Muñoz fell to him at the back post.

The new signing Daichi Kamada then forced the Brentford goalkeeper Mark Flekken into a mistake that led to Wissa being booked for bringing down Eze, with the England forward firing the resulting free-kick inches wide.

Eze had the ball in the net with another free-kick that caught Flekken napping at his near post but it was disallowed by the referee Samuel Barrott after he felt that Will Hughes had fouled Nathan Collins as they waited for the kick to be taken and blew his whistle before the ball had crossed the line.

"I was told [by the referee] that he blew too early and made the mistake," Eze said. "It could have changed the game but we have to deal with it. It wasn't our only chance."

Glasner was also not impressed and his mood was not improved when Brentford took the lead. Mitchell was caught upfield by a quick break and Wissa's clever flick allowed Mbeumo to glide into the area and curl past Dean Henderson without being challenged by Guéhi. It then needed a brilliant reaction save from Henderson to deny Kristoffer Ajer from a corner.



◀ *Crystal Palace protest against the controversial decision that ruled out Eberechi Eze's first-half strike*
PAUL CHILDS/REUTERS

Odsonne Édouard replaced Mateta for the second half but Brentford again came close to doubling their lead when Collins just failed to get a touch on to Pinnock's flick-on. Pinnock knew less about the deflection that came off him to divert Adam Wharton's shot just wide after it had initially struck Mads Roerslev. But his luck ran out when Mitchell's deep cross was headed back across goal by Muñoz and Pinnock watched in horror as he turned it into his own net under pressure from Édouard.

The Frenchman was guilty of making his run too early when played in by Eze shortly afterwards, with the assistant's flag muting the celebrations of the Palace fans who thought they had taken the lead. Increasingly influential in midfield he was surprisingly substituted just before Wissa's winner, with Wharton's effort from distance parried away by Flekken as the visitors smelled blood.

The DR Congo forward made the most of his opportunity after Henderson had saved a deflected shot from Collins, with Flekken pulling off a brilliant save to deny Eze late on and ensure that Frank went home happier than his Palace counterpart.

Brentford	Crystal Palace
4-3-3 Flekken; Roerslev, Collins, Pinnock, Ajer; Nørgaard, Janelt (Damsgaard 74), Jensen (Onyeka 84); Mbeumo (Mee 90), Wissa● (Carvalho 84) Schade (Lewis-Potter 74) *Subs not used* Valdimarsson, Trevitt, Yarmoliuk, Peart-Harris	**3-4-2-1** Henderson; Richards● (Sarr 84), Andersen●, Guéhi●; Muñoz, Wharton (Lerma 74), Hughes (Doucouré 84), Mitchell; Kamada● (Ayew● 70), Eze; Mateta (Édouard ht) *Subs not used* Clyne, Johnstone, Riad, Schlupp

Referee Samuel Barrott **Attendance** 16,988



Bryan Mbeumo fires Brentford in front during the first half
JACQUES FEENEY/OFFSIDE/GETTY IMAGES

'I'm fine, thank god': Forest's Danilo leaves hospital after horror injury

Jonathan Veal

The Nottingham Forest midfielder Danilo has vowed to be "back soon" after breaking his ankle seven minutes into the new Premier League season. The 23-year-old sustained the sickening injury when he fell awkwardly after an early aerial challenge with Bournemouth's Antoine Semenyo in Forest's 1-1 draw.

Danilo needed nine minutes of treatment, with club staff using blankets to shield him from the crowd, and was transferred straight to Queen's medical centre in Nottingham.

Danilo was able to return home later on Saturday and posted on Instagram: "Hey guys, I'm stopping by to say that I'm fine, thank god, and I'm already home. We'll be back soon and thank you all for the message of support."

Nuno Espírito Santo had already confirmed Danilo will face a lengthy layoff. "It is a horrible one for everybody," the Forest manager said. "We are going to miss him, not only on the pitch. We know him, always smiling, always joyful. He is a very important player for us. We wish him all the best."

Nuno said "not only our players" were affected by the incident, but "everybody involved in the stadium – it stays in the head of the players".

The Bournemouth manager, Andoni Iraola, said: "We could see straight away [the seriousness of the injury], I realised it's going to be very bad."

Forest took the lead not long after Danilo's injury when Chris Wood struck but Semenyo snatched a point for the visitors in the 86th minute. Bournemouth were without their record signing, Evanilson, whose move from Porto for a fee that could surpass £40m was not finalised in time for him to feature.



▲ *Danilo was treated on the pitch for nine minutes by Forest medical staff*

Meanwhile the Lille midfielder Angel Gomes has said he is "all good" after being taken to hospital with a serious head injury during his side's Ligue 1 game with Reims.

Gomes wrote on Instagram: "Just a message to let everyone know that I'm all good! The support has been overwhelming and I just thank God everything is okay. Love and blessings! PS. Remind me not to jump for no more headers." **PA Media**

Kovacic and City expose gulf in class on hard day for Maresca



Chelsea	0
Manchester City	2
Haaland 18, Kovacic 84	

	Chelsea	Man City
Possession	46%	54%
Shots on target	3	5
Total attempts	10	11

Jacob Steinberg
Stamford Bridge

Efficient, controlled and ruthless enough to win without hitting top speed, this was Manchester City proving that Diet Pep has a long way to go before challenging the full-fat version. Chelsea have taken a huge leap of faith with the appointment of Enzo Maresca, who was plotting how to take Leicester City out of the Championship a year ago, but based on their ineffectiveness in defeat against the champions it is going to be a while before Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital see their occasionally baffling project come together.

The gulf in class and experience was vast. At times, as City made the ball do the work, it was like watching a team of dads outmanoeuvre enthusiastic kids who had only met earlier in the day. In truth, Chelsea were never in it after that inevitable moment when Erling Haaland crept away from Levi Colwill, took a clever flick from Bernardo Silva and set City on their way with the first of what will surely be another prosperous season in front of goal.

There, in Haaland's 91st goal in 100 games, it was: a world-class player punishing a team built around the hope of winning tomorrow – although



▲ *Pep Guardiola congratulates Mateo Kovacic after his goal sealed three points for City*
JAMES GILL/DANEHOUSE/GETTY IMAGES

if you wanted one moment to sum up why Guardiola so comprehensively dismissed his former assistant, it could be found in the way City's second goal arrived.

First came the loose clearance from Wesley Fofana, one of many centre-backs deemed more useful than the ostracised Trevoh Chalobah. Then, when the ball dropped to the imperious Mateo Kovacic, the £200m duo of Moisés Caicedo and

Enzo Fernández failed to stop the Croatian from powering forward and punishing his old team by bending in a long-range effort that seemed to float through Robert Sánchez.

It was a horrible goal to concede, not least because it was scored by the kind of player who no longer has a space at Chelsea. Maresca has his work cut out managing a bloated squad. He will trust that there will be more fluency once Cole Palmer returns to full sharpness. The Italian will know, though, that he is under pressure to show why Chelsea brought him in. City will probably face a sterner examination with a hearing into their alleged breaches of the Premier League's financial rules reportedly due to begin next month.

Those 115 charges continue to hang over this team and could potentially halt their attempts to win a fifth consecutive title. For now, though, Arsenal and the rest of the chasing pack will be reliant on City dropping their standards. Here, even with Rodri absent, Oscar Bobb out with a fractured leg and Phil Foden, Kyle Walker and John Stones fit enough only for the bench, there was no sign of less hunger from Guardiola's team.

Maresca, who is from the Guardiola possession school, soon heard the home fans grumbling about his team's ponderous buildup from the back. Change does not necessarily mean better. Chelsea appeared to be moving in the right direction under Mauricio Pochettino, who led them to sixth place last season, and the mood in the stands was restless. City's opener was soon followed by plaintive chants for the discarded Conor Gallagher, who is waiting to complete his move to Atlético Madrid.

Gallagher's energy could have prevented Kovacic from pulling the strings in midfield. Chelsea, though, continue to follow their path. Afterwards Maresca stressed he has too many players. There was a long pause when he was asked if he still wants Raheem Sterling after finding no place for the winger in the matchday squad. Sterling wants "clarity" over his future.

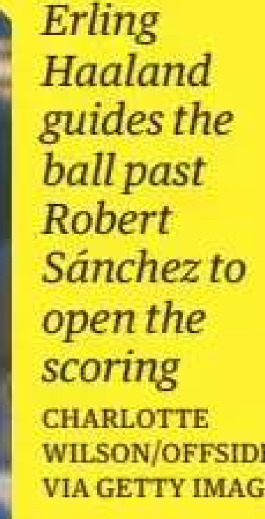
Maresca, meanwhile, will hold an inquest into the defending that allowed City to take control. It felt too easy when Jérémy Doku dribbled inside from the left flank and found Silva. Caicedo and Roméo Lavia were not close enough to Silva and the Portuguese's flick unbalanced Chelsea, leaving Haaland to elude Colwill, sort out his feet, hold off Marc Cucurella and lift his shot over Sánchez.

Up and running, City could have been out of sight at half-time. Kevin De Bruyne shot just wide. Silva and Doku tested Sánchez. Savinho, who enjoyed a promising debut after joining from Troyes, went on a few exciting dribbles down the right. As for the hosts, there were a few grumbles after three wayward passes from Fernández, who was controversially wearing the captain's armband weeks after his involvement in a racism storm that briefly sparked civil war in Maresca's dressing room.

Chelsea were better with more intensity. There were a few dangerous dribbles down the left from Christopher Nkunku, albeit nothing that unduly worried the excellent Rico Lewis. Nicolas Jackson had a goal disallowed for offside. Haaland soon drew another save from Sánchez. Maresca needed more in the final third. Pedro Neto came on for his debut, replacing Nkunku, who had done little to show that he was a more effective option than Sterling on the left. Lewis soon had to make a crucial challenge to deny Neto. Ederson denied Jackson.

Yet the pressure soon fizzled out. City had regained control long before Kovacic pounced. Boehly, looking weary, watched his former player score and was soon seen leaving his seat. More than £1bn spent and Chelsea are still playing catchup.





City make quick start in title defence

Erling Haaland guides the ball past Robert Sánchez to open the scoring
CHARLOTTE WILSON/OFFSIDE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Chelsea
4-3-3
Sánchez; Gusto, Fofana, Colwill, Cucurella (Veiga 80); Lavia (Dewsbury-Hall 67), Caicedo, Fernández; Palmer, Jackson (Guiu 67), Nkunku (Neto 58)
Subs not used
Jørgensen, Adarabioyo, Badiashile, Madueke, Mudryk

Manchester City
4-2-3-1
Ederson; Lewis, Akanji, Dias, Gvardiol; Kovacic, Silva; Doku, De Bruyne, Savinho (Foden ht); Haaland
Subs not used
Ortega, Walker, Aké, Stones, Nunes, O'Reilly, McAtee, Grealish

Referee Anthony Taylor **Attendance** 39,818

Analysis
Jonathan Wilson *Stamford Bridge*



▲ *Enzo Fernández was a surprise choice for captain against Manchester City*
CATHERINE IVILL/AMA/GETTY IMAGES

Sense of chaos continues as confused Boehly still searches for club's soul

The more things change, the more they stay the same. There have been nine arrivals at Chelsea this season and seven departures, a net £75m spent. There's a new manager and a new kit, and there will shortly be a new sponsor. The churn and turmoil goes on, and yet amid it all, the performances remain reassuringly familiar.

Nicolas Jackson continues to be offside a lot. Cole Palmer continues to look like the one real spark of attacking quality. Marc Cucurella continues to look a player far removed from the left-back who plays for Spain. The two £100m midfielders continue to look essentially average. Chants for Conor Gallagher, in limbo as his move to Atlético stalls, were the only overt opposition to the club's transfer policy. Todd Boehly may have trimmed his hair, but he continues to sit in the executive box looking benignly confused.

And of course there was the greatest constant of all in the modern game, the sense of unreality. In many ways this was the perfect way to start the season, a battle of the Premier League's two most successful sides of the past decade, one of them facing 115 Premier League charges for alleged breaches of the financial fair play regulations – which they deny – and the other subject to a far-reaching investigation of possible offences by their previous owner. If there is an expectation of a transfer ban, it would at least provide some explanation for their market activity this summer.

This is a season that should resolve one case and bring greater clarity as to exactly what the other one entails. Both have the potential to be extremely damaging to the credibility of the Premier League. All of football now feels like one of those passages of play after a possible offside when everybody's waiting to see if a flag will belatedly go up. Is it real? Does it count? Will any of it matter? Or is it all just ghost football that could be exorcised at any moment?

There were moments when Chelsea threatened to get in behind City, with whom they drew both games last season and the performance wasn't dreadful, but it was disjointed and there were a remarkable number of individual errors, most significantly as Moisés Caicedo and Enzo Fernández allowed Mateo Kovacic to wander past them before scoring the decisive second.

The sense of chaos was compounded by the omission of Raheem Sterling – or, more accurately, by his camp's reaction to it as they released a statement appealing for "clarity on the situation". Sterling, having returned early for individual training, played some part in all six of Chelsea's pre-season games and evidently expected to be involved, despite the fact they won only one of those games. He was informed on Friday of the "technical decision" to omit him.

But to an extent this is the problem of having 48 first-team players. Chelsea had five wide forwards in their match-day 20: Cole Palmer, Christopher Nkunku, Mykhailo Mudryk, Noni Madueke and Pedro Neto would presumably have been just as disappointed to be overlooked.

For the second season running Chelsea began the season without a main shirt sponsor, having failed to find anybody willing to pay the reported £60m asking price. A short-term deal is expected to be announced soon, but for now everybody gets to enjoy, unadulterated, the swirling blue pattern of the kit. It has the feel of a British Gas advert of about a decade ago, but apparently represents the hottest part of a flame and thus the "passion, drive and determination" of the club, while also featuring a "melting pot pattern" that symbolises "the fusion of Chelsea's rich legacy with the dynamic culture of London".

Speaking of which, Fernández was named as captain a month after sharing a video showing him and various Argentina teammates singing racist songs. While it's possible to sympathise with Chelsea in that the offence didn't happen on their watch, it is their mess to clear up. Having him offer an apology and make a contribution to an anti-racism charity looks a less than stringent sanction and their insistence the matter is closed feels both optimistic and uncomfortably expedient.

That dynamic culture costs fans an average 5% more to be part of this season and does not stretch to allowing children to take photographs on their phones of the post-match interviews or to have the geography and lore of the ground explained to them by accompanying adults; stewards were quick to chase away those who lingered, explaining: "If we allow that, we'll be here all day."

Fans who are treated as an inconvenience, academy products flogged off to make an accounting trick work, a squad so big they need a network of clubs just to accommodate them. Clearlake and Boehly promised to be disruptive; the result appears a broken club in desperate search for a soul.

Guardiola praise for sharp Haaland

Continued *from page 42*

to their title defence. Haaland opened the scoring before Kovacic sealed the points. "If you are the best team in England, 38 games we're going to defend the crown, we have to behave like we were, a champion team," Guardiola said. "Today I said we'd suffer moments, but it's how we'll help each other."

He praised Haaland, who looked tired at the end of last season. "I had a feeling he feels better than last season at this stage," Guardiola said. "His contribution in many things, there is a gap to improve as well."

Haaland has scored 91 goals in 100 Premier League games. "Numbers like Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, the last decade, 15 years, in terms of numbers," said Guardiola, who was happy to win with Rodri missing through injury. "Rodri is massively important for us. We are wishing him back as quickly as possible but for now it's survive. Last season we couldn't beat Chelsea, now we did it."

Finals day
London Spirit and Invincibles clinch Hundred titles at Lord's
Page 34 →

Slim margin
Niewiadoma wins closest ever Tour de France Femmes
Page 36 →

Sport



Kevin De Bruyne congratulates Erling Haaland after his goal against Chelsea MARC ATKINS/ GETTY IMAGES



Chelsea



0



Manchester City

2

Haaland 18
Kovacic 84

Look who's back
Haaland strikes as Chelsea deal with Sterling fallout

Jacob Steinberg
Stamford Bridge

Enzo Maresca offered Raheem Sterling no assurances over his future after making the surprise decision to drop the winger when Chelsea began their season with a 2-0 defeat against Manchester City yesterday, Erling Haaland and Mateo Kovacic scoring the goals.

Sterling, who has said through his representatives that he is looking for "clarity" over his status at Stamford Bridge, is one of several players who could be sold before the transfer window shuts this month. The 29-year-old, who has three years left on a deal worth more than £300,000 a week, was surprised not to have even a place on the bench for Maresca's first competitive game in charge.

"The only thing I can say was a technical decision and we will find clarity," Chelsea's new head coach said. "All the players, if they want to be Chelsea players we want to try and see how we can use them. I want Raheem Sterling but we have 30 players. Raheem, we will clarify in the next days."

Chelsea are waiting to complete Conor Gallagher's sale to Atlético Madrid, who are looking to send João Félix in the opposite direction. They hope to sign the Nigeria striker Victor Osimhen from Napoli, who want to buy Romelu Lukaku from the west London club. Maresca has said Ben Chilwell, the England left-back, is not in his plans and he also found no room for Trevoh Chalobah, Armando Broja and Carney Chukwuemeka in his match-day squad.

The Italian was asked if players seemingly destined for the exit can still impress him. "Carney is a very good player but I think the best thing for him is to play 30 to 35 games in a row and show how good he is," he said. "For us, is he going to play 35 games? I don't think so."



▲ *Enzo Maresca gave no guarantees regarding Raheem Sterling's future*

Maresca defended his decision to hand the captaincy to Enzo Fernández a month after the Argentina midfielder was embroiled in a racism scandal. Fernández is still under investigation for a video in which he and other Argentina players sang an offensive chant about black France players. The incident went down badly with Chelsea's French players, although the air has since been cleared.

"I did mistakes in the past and I recognise that," Maresca said. "I think if as a human being you make a mistake and recognise you are not going to be punished for life."

Pep Guardiola was delighted with City's start


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Toney left out for Brentford over 'transfer interest'

Ed Aarons
Gtech Stadium

Thomas Frank has insisted Ivan Toney accepted the decision to leave him out of Brentford's opening game of the season against Crystal Palace after revealing "there's a lot of transfer interest" in the England striker.

Toney has entered the final year of his contract and made no secret of his desire to leave Brentford, with Arsenal, Chelsea and the Saudi Pro League side al-Ahli having all been linked with him this summer. But while Frank admitted that a move is "not close", he explained that the decision to omit Toney from his matchday squad had been taken by him and the club on Thursday.

"A lot of things are going on with Ivan, especially with transfers, there's a lot of transfer interest. Because of all that, we've decided not to include him in the squad," Frank told Sky Sports before kick-off.

Asked after Yoane Wissa's goal gave Brentford a 2-1 win how Toney had taken the news, Frank said: "There was no problem. Ivan always wants to play. He has been one of our best players over a long period of time. We saw last year that like with any good player, one day they will leave the club and someone else needs to step up and do well. Every time Ivan hasn't played then Wissa has stepped up and he did that again today."

The Palace captain, Marc Guéhi, played the whole game despite transfer interest from Newcastle. Palace are understood to have rejected their latest bid worth up to £65m but the chairman, Steve Parish, admitted he has held talks with Newcastle's sporting director, Paul Mitchell, and other clubs had also shown an interest in the England defender. "Paul Mitchell and I have had a chat about this, Parish told TalkSport. "We've had conversations with other clubs that have expressed interest."

Brentford edge to victory *Page 39* →



▲ *Ivan Toney was not selected in Brentford's squad for their opener*

BR01818 01/2024

DOWN

1 A legally recognised union of two people in a romantic relationship (1 word)

2 The feeling of having a duty to someone or something (1 word)

3 Looking to the future (2 words)

4 A policy that pays out a sum of money to help look after your family if you pass away (2 words)

5 When something is done it's ______ (1 word)

6 The feeling of being safe (1 word)





ACROSS

7 A type of insurance that supports you if you can't work due to sickness or injury (2 words)

8 An application for a payout from an insurer (1 word)

9 The person that receives an insurance policy payout (1 word)

10 The property and money you will leave behind for your loved ones (1 word)

11 A legal document that sets out how you would like your estate to be distributed (1 word)

12 The absence of stress or anxiety (3 words)

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